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Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet (née de Bengy)
Foundress of the Society: "Faithful Companions of Jesus."
Born at Châteauroux (Indre) Sep.r 21st 1781.
Died at Paris April 5th 1858.

LIFE

OF THE

VISCOUNTESS DE BONNAULT D'HOUET

FOUNDRESS OF THE SOCIETY OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS

1781-1858

BY THE

REV. FATHER STANISLAUS, F.M. CAPUCHIN

OF THE PROVINCE OF PARIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY ONE OF HER DAUGHTERS

WITH PREFACES BY

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE

ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER

AND BY THE

RIGHT REV. ABBOT GASQUET

PRESIDENT OF THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINES

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✠ FRANCISCUS CARDINALIS BOURNE,
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PREFACE
TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE.

THERE is no period in the history of the Catholic Church more wonderful for the foundation of new religious educational Institutes than the years during which religion was gradually restored in France after the desolation of the French Revolution.

God seems to have willed to show forth His almighty power by raising up on the very ruins of old institutions, which had to some extent lost their vigour, new and vigorous Societies whose work should eventually surpass both in the old world and the new all previous efforts of a similar kind.

Three Institutes have been specially blessed by God: the Congregation of Notre Dame instituted by the Blessed Julie Billiart, the Society of the Sacred Heart founded by the Blessed Madeleine Sophie Barat, and the Society of Faithful Companions of Jesus of which the subject of this biography conceived the idea. All three Institutes have rendered and are rendering untold service to the Catholic Church in many parts of the world, in the varied work of Primary and Secondary Education, of Training Colleges or Normal Schools, and in all the activities which nowadays are intimately connected with various types of education.

They train up thousands of children of every position to lead useful, edifying, Christian lives; they keep in close touch with them as far as may be in after life; indirectly they do untold good to all those who come under the influence which, as Mother of families, or as Religious, or in any other capacity, their former pupils exercise in numberless ways.

But while all three congregations have a similar work, they carry it out each in its own way, so that each has its own well-defined and characteristic spirit, which it imprints on those whom it has formed. And it is largely in the biographies of the Holy Foundresses that we find the reason of the varying characteristics that distinguish their foundations. Thus nothing can be more useful and at the same time more interesting to all who know the work of their children than to study it in the life of their spiritual Mother.

Every Divine work is marked with the cross, and the special cross attached to the courageous enterprise of the Servant of God, the Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet, was that having been greatly aided in the beginning by certain ecclesiastics, these same priests should afterwards, by the Divine permission, have become estranged from her, and placed many obstacles in her path. Thus it is that God gives us at certain periods in our journey through life human sympathy and assistance. When it seems good to Him, human help is withdrawn, and we are left, humanly speaking, solitary and desolate, that we may understand that He, our Master, alone is necessary, and that He is all-sufficient to us.

We commend the study of this translation of the most recent life of Madame d'Houet to all the members

of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and to their pupils past and present, for we are confident that they will find therein great motives for glorifying God who is wonderful in His Saints, and for fresh endeavours to give honour by their lives to Him from whom through this, His chosen servant, they have received so many of the greatest blessings which He has bestowed upon them.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

LONDON, *May*, 1913.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Written by the Right Rev. ABBOT GASQUET, President of the English Benedictines.

Among the shadowy figures which come forth from the mists of my early recollections, one stands out with exceptional distinctness. It is the person of the venerable servant of God who is the subject of this biography, to which I have been asked to contribute a few lines of Introduction.

It must have been, I believe, somewhere about the year 1851 that with my brothers and sisters I was taken by our parents to the Convent of Somers Town in London, and was there presented to a little old lady with a grave yet smiling face, dressed all in black like the nuns of the convent, who had been our earliest friends as children and who had done their best not to spoil us. We had been told that the lady on this occasion the centre of attraction in the convent parlour, was a very great and holy woman, and we gathered that in some way or other she was connected with the great French Revolution and with the beginnings of the Convent of Somers Town. To-day, it is a pleasure to think that once, long years ago, I thus saw and had

some words of blessing spoken to me by Madame de Bonnault d'Houet, the Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Madame d'Houet—to give her the name by which she was generally known—was a remarkable woman in every sense of the word. Those who will read this biography, now translated for the benefit of English readers, will certainly agree with me that this is so. She was born in 1781, on the very eve of the Great Revolution, at Châteauroux in France, a town in the department of Indre. The name of her family was de Bengy, and she had the inestimable advantage of having pious and solidly Catholic parents whose first care was to see that their children received a sound education in religion. Her father suffered imprisonment for his opinions during the Reign of Terror, and for some years amidst the horrors of the Revolution; it was of course impossible for anyone of the household to have the consolations and helps of the Mass and Sacraments.

In August, 1804, Victoire, as this daughter of Monsieur de Bengy was called, married Antoine, the eldest son of the Viscount de Bonnault d'Houet, an excellent youth and an exceptionally pious Catholic. The married life of the young couple as it is described in these pages recalls that of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal and her husband. Like this union, too, that of Madame d'Houet with her husband was destined, by God's Providence, to be of short duration, for like Saint Jane Frances, Madame d'Houet was called to become the mother of a great religious family.

After only ten months of a happy and model

married life, Monsieur de Bonnault died in the arms of his young wife. Thus at an early age left a widow, Madame d'Houet devoted herself more and more to religious exercises, although some years were destined to pass away before the designs of God in her regard became manifest. At first she felt no attraction towards the life of a religious, and although pious and exact in a degree beyond the ordinary Christian, she was fond of society and eager to take her part in the world. Gradually, however, the idea formed itself in her mind that God had given her a call to something higher than a natural life, however good—to something more noble than the enjoyment of friends even when sanctified by the exact fulfilment of every religious duty. At first it seemed as if she was destined to seek admission into one or other of the then existing religious orders of women. Then, after some years of doubt and distress, and a long period of that keen mental suffering by which God so often chastens those whom he loves, and tests the faith and the courage of those whom He calls to do some great work for Him and His Church, the clouds lifted and her path was made clear to her. God's call, as she then saw it in the light given to her, was to establish a new Institute, the members of which should be pledged to serve our Blessed Lord on the model of the Holy Women who followed Him in His pilgrimage on earth and ministered to Him and His disciples with their own hands. The idea naturally suggested the title she should give to the new religious body—the Faithful Companions of Jesus—and she found in the constitutions of the Jesuits the main principles upon which the Institute should be governed.

At first the growth of the body was slow; for a year or two it looked as if the seed was not destined to germinate, still less that it would bring forth fruit a hundredfold. But Madame d'Houet, secure in belief in God's call, never for a moment lost courage, but calmly waited for God's good time to come. . . . It came at last and the first signs of life appeared in 1823, when the first novitiate of the Institute was opened. The following year saw the beginning of two new houses, and henceforth the progress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus was assured and constant, especially after the reception of its formal approval in 1837.

Naturally, English readers will be most interested in the story of the first beginnings of the convents of the congregation in England and Ireland. Without entering into details of the different foundations of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, which are now flourishing communities doing a great work in the cause of Catholic education in our midst, some brief account may be given of Madame d'Houet's coming to this country and the first establishment in London.

It was in the month of November, 1830, that Madame d'Houet, accompanied by another nun, Mother Julia, reached London. She had received a letter of introduction to the priest then ministering to the French *émigré* colony at Somers Town. This was Father Jean Nérinckx, a native of French Flanders whom the French Revolution had exiled, who also from the first had assisted the celebrated Abbé Carron in the great work he had accomplished for the benefit of his fellow-refugees in that part of London. Abbé Carron had been recalled to France in 1814, and was obliged to leave the

care of what he called "my large colony of Little France of Somers Town," to this Father Nérinckx, whom he had learned, as he says, to regard as "a saintly, apostolic, and able priest".

It was here to this house in Clarendon Square, that Madame d'Houet and her companion came to find him on the 11th of November, 1830. She had come to consult him as to the possibility of establishing a house of her Institute of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in London. She had expected to find the priest alone in a small house with possibly one servant, but was altogether unprepared to see him engaged with his sister, Miss Nérinckx, in conducting a school for young ladies which had been begun by the Abbé Carron in the first instance to help the French *émigrées*. The number of the children and their dress showed the two nuns at once that the place was a well-established school, and the buildings already erected indicated that a not inconsiderable sum of money had been expended upon them.

The coming of Mother d'Houet and her fellow-nun was in reality providential as it turned out. On proposing her project to Father Nérinckx he replied at some length in words which are recorded by Madame d'Houet herself, and the substance of which, as they relate to the story of the first beginnings of the convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Somers Town, may be briefly given here. They will be found set down at length in their proper place in this Biography. "You have told me," Father Nérinckx said, "your projects and your secrets, now I am going to tell you mine. This establishment (the school which they had found in

existence) was founded by Abbé Carron, and on his return to France was handed over to me. My sister and I have bestowed all the care possible on it, and have this year increased the buildings at a cost of 150,000 francs (£600). But we have often been anxious as to the future. If one or other of us were to be taken away, the work would soon come to an end. For this reason we have ardently wished that some nuns would come and take our place here." He then went on to say that he had long thought that God would some day send the necessary religious, and that on the arrival of Madame d'Houet and her companion both he and his sister had recognized God's answer to their desires and prayers. He further said that the other eight young lady teachers in the establishment all looked upon the coming of the nuns as providential, and were ready to assist in every way the transfer of the entire establishment into their hands. The house and furniture, he said, belonged to him and his sister, and they had no debt of any kind on the place. Beyond this both Miss Nérinckx and the eight other mistresses of the school were more than anxious to join the Institute of which Madame d'Houet was the Superior, if they, after trial, proved themselves proper subjects.

This generous and wholly unexpected offer was accepted and received the entire approbation of the Bishop, who, like Monsieur Nérinckx and his sister, saw in the arrangement a providential settlement to ensure the continuance of the work begun by Abbé Carron and continued by the saintly and zealous Father Nérinckx, who had assisted him in the foundation of Somers Town at the beginning and had succeeded him in 1814.

Nothing now stood in the way of the Reverend Mother, who with Mother Julie took possession of the establishment on 16 November, 1830. At once Miss Nérinckx and the other English ladies who had worked with her placed themselves under the obedience of Madame d'Houet and of the Rule, and entirely entered into the spirit of the new Institute. Everything went on as regularly as in the other convents of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and in this complete obedience of ladies who had hitherto managed the house as they pleased, Madame d'Houet recognized, no doubt rightly, once more the manifestation of God's guiding Providence.

After two months' residence in Somers Town, Madame d'Houet returned to France on 13 January, 1831. Miss Nérinckx, at her own request and at the wish of her brother, went with her, so as to receive a thorough religious training in a well-established convent of the Sisters in France. Mother Julie was left behind as Superior.

In this way was begun the work of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in England. Madame d'Houet died in 1858, but before this time she had the consolation of seeing her work in England and Ireland as elsewhere prosper and extend its usefulness. Several large and important convents for the benefit of English-speaking Catholics were then in existence. She paid many visits to this country during the period of 1830 to her death, and it was on one of these occasions that I saw her, as I have said, in the little parlour of the convent at Clarendon Square, Somers Town.

Father Nérinckx, too, was there; and Mother Julie,

our special friend as children, was doing the honours of the convent to the visitors who had come to pay their respects to the rightly revered and saintly Mother-General. Though now it appears as a far-off vision, I have always thought of this memory of the saintly Madame d'Houet, as one of the most distinct and precious recollections of my early childhood.

FRANCIS AIDAN GASQUET, D.D.,
Abbot President of the English Benedictines.

ROME, *April*, 1910.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FRENCH WORK

In the year 1863, the Abbé Martin published a life of Madame de Bonnault d'Houet.

The single edition of this work is exhausted. It was written too somewhat hastily, and reproduced but imperfectly the details of her wonderful life, so that her daughters have long desired to see in print something more exhaustive.

I have ventured in all humility to undertake a task for which I feel I am ill-fitted. I have but little aptitude for the work, my time is not my own, and I lack that knowledge of the mystic life which is so necessary when treating of the Saints of God. On the other hand, it is important to meet the want that is now felt and to publish a work which will be a connecting link between the edition out of print and the complete life that a more capable writer will undertake later on.

In answer to the earnest demands of the religious who have not known their Foundress, of their pupils, and of the friends of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, I have undertaken the difficult task of publishing a simple notice of the life and works of Madame d'Houet. It has been my privilege to have had free access to very interesting and intimate MSS., so that the present work is mainly a reproduction of

these writings. I have occasionally taken the liberty of adding explanations, and in some cases of eliminating lengthy details, but, as far as possible, the wording is preserved as it fell from the pen of the Foundress herself. Together with Madame d'Houet's private documents, I have made use of some of the depositions and other materials which were produced in the ecclesiastical courts charged in France, Italy, and England, to examine into her life and heroic virtues. Had I made a freer use of these materials, this work would have exceeded the proposed limits. As it stands, it is merely a collated arrangement of hitherto unpublished documents. In thus putting them together I trust I have not robbed them of their original charm.

My constant aim throughout has been to avoid all expressions that might seem to anticipate the judgment of our Holy Mother, the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church. Should any such expression have escaped me, I declare beforehand my wish to withdraw, disapprove and condemn whatever in this point or in any other would be opposed to her enlightened teaching. May this modest work serve for the glory of God, for the honour of His Servant, and for the edification of the reader.

F. STANISLAUS,
F.M. Capuchin, L.I.

PARIS, VIGIL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST,
June 23rd, 1894.

Archbishop's House,
Paris.

Paris, *March 18th*, 1895.

Rev. and Dear Father Stanislaus,

I most gladly authorize the publication of "The Life, Virtues and Works of the Venerable Servant of God, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet, Foundress of the Society of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus". The work will give much edification, but it will be specially useful to the Servant of God's religious family. In reading it they cannot fail to be more and more imbued with the spirit of their holy Foundress.

I am happy to count the Faithful Companions of Jesus amongst the congregations of the Archdiocese.

To you and to them I heartily give anew a paternal blessing.

✠ FRANÇOIS, CARD. RICHARD,
Archbishop of Paris.

LETTER

OF THE

RIGHT REV. BISHOP BÉCEL, BISHOP OF VANNES,

TO THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS.

VANNES, *January 14th*, 1895.
FEAST OF ST. HILARY, BISHOP, DOCTOR.

MY VERY DEAR DAUGHTERS,

As you know, a new work on the life of your venerated Mother and of your Society is about to be published.

The zealous religious who has undertaken its publication has given it his best efforts. He has been kind enough to submit the proof sheets to me before they were printed and they have edified me deeply. Let me transmit to you certain thoughts which came to me when reading the MS. They may give you pleasure. Your Foundress's life in its present issue possesses the interest of an autobiography in which, despite her efforts at self-effacement, her individuality is clearly mirrored. This biography is a frame enclosing a rare and precious portrait. It is easy for me, my dear Sisters, who have so long watched the rich ingatherings from your fields of toil, to recognize that you have been trained in an excellent school—a school in which you

were taught to practise the virtues of your holy and noble state, and to give to the young girls entrusted to your guidance the benefits of an excellent training and a superior education. Still, let me confess it, I had never thoroughly realized the source of your success.

How true it is, my dear daughters, that a religious Institute prospers only in so far as the members are imbued with the spirit of their Founder or Foundress and keep the sacred deposit of their traditions intact and unchanged. Now, what was the spirit that animated Madame d'Houet? What lessons, what examples, has she left as heirlooms to her children? You know them already and these pages will unfold them anew. God raised up this chosen woman, your Foundress, at the beginning of the present century, and inspired her with the noble ambition of calling herself a "Faithful Companion of Jesus". Guided by grace, she grouped around her other valiant and zealous women, and as gold is tried in the crucible so was she tried in the furnace of affliction. She came forth purified and saturated with that supernatural strength which enabled her to overcome whatever opposed the Divine call she had received, to sanctify herself and to sacrifice herself for the good of others.

It is from her, my dear daughters, through the medium of the able Superior-Generals who have succeeded her in the government of your Society, that you receive the wise maternal guidance which is helping you in the accomplishing of your duties and in the cultivating of the religious spirit. Like her, they lead you gently in the path of self-renouncement and keep before you the end of your vocation.

In your communities, thanks to the special blessing of God, reverence for authority, alas! almost unknown in our world, holds an honoured place. For this the Faithful Companions of Jesus deserve all praise, for with filial piety and deep-seated loyalty rallying round their superiors, they show to a world forgetful of the Divine commandment that honour is due to authority.

I do not hesitate to say that the respect and love which you vie with one another in bestowing upon your Superiors will be loyal and far-reaching in proportion as they themselves walk in the footsteps of your Foundress. We read that she always gave her orders with consideration and sweetness, and softened reprimands by the kind and gentle words in which they were couched. It is in this spirit that your Superiors have guided you — and most happily. Despite the many crosses and contradictions they have met with, they have always courageously pursued their efforts for the welfare of your Society, by keeping constantly in view the two-fold object of your vocation—your own personal sanctification by encouraging you to the practice of high virtue, and the education of the young, by keeping abreast of the intellectual progress and culture of modern days. On her death-bed your saintly Foundress turned towards her daughters and uttered these memorable words: "God has given us four sisters—humility, mildness, poverty, and obedience. If you practise these virtues God will preserve our Society in the future even as he has preserved it in the past." Now it is precisely because the daughters of Madame d'Houet have always lived in intimacy with these four sisters, that they have called down upon themselves the

blessings of Heaven, and have gained well-earned esteem and respect. The perusal of your Foundress's life, my dear daughters, will help to keep before your minds the true characteristics of your Society. You remember the esteem in which she held those two incomparable books — the "Holy Gospel" and the "Imitation of Jesus Christ". "They have," she says, "an astonishing effect upon me; each time I read them with fresh interest. I would willingly consent never to read anything else." She wished her daughters to read them frequently. I think that the life of your first Mother and Foundress ought also to be the object of your frequent meditation. Where can you better learn the true spirit of your vocation? Meditation on it will help you in all your trials. It may happen that in a moment of despondency, the evil one will tempt you to cast a longing look upon the past, to shirk difficulties and to listen to the promptings of the flesh. Oh! in such moments, think of your venerable Foundress. Let the thought of her struggles, interior and exterior, arm you for the combat, and from them gain comfort, as you note how suffering is ever followed by consolation, joy, and peace. She never forgot that she was a daughter of the Church militant, and took to heart its troubles, making them her own. Outcome of her devotion to Holy Church was her loyalty and filial submission to the Bishops with whom she had relations. Was it not at the inspiration of your Foundress that the Superior-General who succeeded her transferred the noviceship of the Institute to Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, and that in the fatal hour of France's misfortune (1870) Reverend Mother Josephine Petit placed the novices

under the powerful protection of St. Anne—the sweet patron of Christian education. We read in the life of Madame d'Houet that for a long time she felt inspired with singular devotion to St. Anne and to St. Joseph. Be this as it may, my dear daughters, it is there in that other Bethany under the shadow of the world-renowned Basilica of St. Anne that we have before our eyes the edifying spectacle of numerous pupils, postulants, novices, sisters, mothers, all united as in one family in the sweet bonds of religious charity. There each one prepares herself for her future by silence, prayer, and the performance of varied duties under the guidance of efficient mistresses, who, by their example, diffuse the good odour of Jesus Christ around them, and train both pupils and young religious for their mission in life. After the example of Jesus Christ His Faithful Companions propose to themselves, above all else, to do the holy Will of God, to extend His Kingdom, to honour the name which they bear, and to accomplish faithfully the duties of their vocation, by observing faithfully unto death the vows they have made, "Ad majorem Dei Gloriam". You will notice in the memoirs of Madame d'Houet that in a moment of great desolation, when she was weeping over the apparent impossibility of beginning her work, words were addressed to her by a holy person, which will help you in your turn, in times of discouragement: "You may weep," it was said to her, "but you will never shed so many tears as there will be souls saved through this Society. God has shown me a great number of persons who will join you in the future." My dear daughters, you form part of that band of holy women, who, filled

with a generous desire of following Jesus Christ here below, will merit through the eternal years to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth". And now, my dear daughters, before I conclude, permit me to congratulate you on the success of your work and the edification you give my diocese. Let me thank you, too, for your filial devotedness to me as your Bishop. If my fervent wishes are to be realized, you will, in no distant future, have the great joy of beholding your dear Foundress of holy and happy memory, honoured publicly by the Church. In the meantime you will enjoy her special protection—a protection she has so manifestly shown you since her death, and above all to those who, in succession, have carried the heavy responsibility of the Generalship. I bless you from my heart and recommend myself now and ever to your fervent prayers.

JEAN MARIE,
Bishop de Vannes.

CONTENTS

PAGE

Approbations iv

Preface by Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster . v

Preface by the Lord Abbot Gasquet, President of the English Benedictines ix

Preface to the French Work by the Author xvii

Authorization, etc., of the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Richard xix

Letter of the Bishop of Vannes xxi

CHAP.

I. Birth, Education, Marriage, Widowhood of Madame de Bonnault d'Houet. 1781-1810 . . . 1

II. God begins to manifest His Will to Madame de Bonnault d'Houet. 1811-1815 17

III. God makes His Will more clearly known to Madame de Bonnault d'Houet. Great trials. 1816-1817 . 33

IV. Madame de Bonnault d'Houet makes the Vow of Chastity. Retreat. Important Decision. Serious Illness. Foundation of the First Convent of the Society at Amiens. 1817-1819 55

V. Beginning of the Society. 1820-1821 . . . 72

VI. Wonders of God's Providence. 1821-1822 . . 90

VII. Trials. Further Undertakings for God's Glory. 1822-1826 102

VIII. Foundations at Châteauroux, Nantes, Sainte-Anne-d'Auray 112

CHAP. PAGE

IX. Madame d'Houet's First Visit to Rome. 1826. . 124

X. Brief of Praise of Leo XII. 144

XI. Election of a Superior-General. Madame d'Houet's Journeys to Bourges and elsewhere. Her Serious Illness. Foundation at Langres. 1826-1829 . 148

XII. Foundations in England, Annecy, Carouge, Estavayer, Bourges, Turin. 1830-1836 160

XIII. Madame d'Houet's Second Visit to Rome. Approbation of the Society by Gregory XVI. 1837 . 188

XIV. Trials. Foundations in Ireland. Journeys of Madame d'Houet. 1837-1847 204

XV. General Survey of the Works of the Society in England and Ireland 227

XVI. Foundations at Paris, Gentilly, England. 1847-1854 238

XVII. Further Trials. Madame d'Houet's last Visit to England. 1856-1857 258

XVIII. Madame d'Houet's last Illness. Death and Burial . 269

XIX. Madame d'Houet's Virtues 290

XX. Madame d'Houet's Virtues (*continued*) . . . 308

XXI. Wonders Performed by Madame d'Houet during her Lifetime 330

XXII. Wonderful Events following Madame d'Houet's Death 347

XXIII. Development and Works of the Faithful Companions of Jesus 355

XXIV. List of the Convents of the Faithful Companions of Jesus 359

XXV. Cause of the Servant of God 362

Alphabetical Index 365

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet (*née* de Bengy), Foundress of the Society, "Faithful Companions of Jesus" *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Birthplace of Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet. Born Sept. 21, 1781 4

Church of St. Martial at Châteauroux (Indre), where Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet was baptized, Sept. 21, 1781

First Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Amiens —"The Cradle of the Society" 16

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Philomena's, Rue des Augustins, Amiens, France . . . . .

The Reverend Joseph Varin, S.J. 26

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Nantes, France 32

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, Morbihan, France . . . . . .

St. Aloysius' Convent, Clarendon Square, London, N.W., West Wing, a portion of which existed in 1830, when School was handed over to Madame de Bonnault d'Houet by Father Nérinckx 54

St. Aloysius' Convent, West Wing (School Building, 1913) .

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Carouge, Geneva, Switzerland 70

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Veyrier-sous-Salève, Haute-Savoie, France . . . . .

FACING PAGE

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Rue de France, Nice, Alpes Maritimes 88

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Gumley House, Isleworth, London, W. 88

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, La Chassotte, Fribourg, Switzerland (late Geneva Convent and Veyrier-sous-Salève Convent) 90

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Turin, Italy . 90

Right Rev. Jean Pierre Gallien, Comte de Châbons, Bishop of Amiens 104

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Laurel Hill, Limerick 110

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Bellerive, Prince's Park, Liverpool 110

The Mother House of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, 63, Rue de la Santé, Paris 124

Sanctuary of the Convent Chapel at Rue de la Santé, Paris . 124

His Holiness Leo XII, Pope 1823-9 132

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Upton Hall, near Birkenhead, Cheshire 142

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Holt Hill, Upper Tranmere, Birkenhead, Cheshire 142

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Adelphi House, Salford, Manchester 146

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, The Hollies, Oak Drive, Fallowfield, Manchester 146

211, Avenue Longchamps, Uccle, Brussels, present residence of the Superior-General 150

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Dee House, Chester 158

From a Photograph by Elliott & Fry

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Mary's, Bruff, Co. Limerick 158

FACING PAGE

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Lark Hill House, Preston 186
From a Photograph by Stackemann & Co., Teddington

St. Mary's Convent, Newtownbarry, Co. Wexford . . .

His Holiness Gregory XVI, Pope 1831-46 198

St. Monica's Convent, Skipton-in-Craven, Yorks . . . 202

St. Mary's Convent, The Newlands, Middlesbrough, Yorks .

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Howrah House, Poplar, London, E. 226

St. Joseph's Convent, West Hartlepool, Durham . . .
From a Photograph by Elliott & Fry

St. Margaret's Convent, Paisley, N.B. 236

Salford Training College, Sedgley Park, Prestwich, Manchester
From a Photograph by Stackemann & Co., Teddington

Right Rev. Denis Auguste Affre, Archbishop of Paris . . 239

His Eminence Cardinal François Marie Benjamin Richard, Archbishop of Paris . . . . . .

Mount St. Joseph's College and Convent, Vaucluse, Richmond, Melbourne, Australia 256

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Genazzano, Kew, Melbourne, Australia . . . . . .

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Our Lady of the Angels, Benalla, Melbourne, Australia . . . 268

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Mary's, Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia . . . . .

Room in which the Foundress died, April 5, 1858. . . . 284

Grave of the Foundress in the Cemetery of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, at Upton Hall, near Birkenhead . . 288

FACING PAGE

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Immaculate Conception, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada . . . .
Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Anne's, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada 307

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Sacred Heart Convent, Calgary, Alberta, Canada . . . . .
Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Aloysius' Convent, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada 328

St. Mary's Schools, Calgary, Alberta, Canada . . . .
One of the Schools Taught by the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada 346

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Fitchburgh, Mass., U.S.A. . . . . .
Church, School, and Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Gilbertville, Mass., U.S.A. 355

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Château de Graty, Hainault, Belgium . . . . . .
Convent du St. Rosaire, Avenue Montjoie, Uccle, Brussels . 356

The Chapel, Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Val Plaisant, Jersey, C.I. . . . . .
Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Bagatelle, Jersey, C.I. 362

CHAPTER I.

IRTH, EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, WIDOWHOOD OF MADAME DE BONNAULT D'HOUET.

1781-1810.

ARIE MADELEINE VICTOIRE DE BENGY was the eldest ild of the Chevalier Sylvain Charles Pierre de Bengy d his wife, Marie de Congy de la Presle.

The de Bengy family held a distinguished position the Province of Berry and traced their descent from bility who fought in the Crusades. Abbé Martin in s Memoir of Madame de Bonnault d'Houet says that ey were highly esteemed by all classes, and while rming part of the best society in France, were dis-nguished in an unbelieving and effeminate age by eir robust, intrepid faith which no ridicule could touch, d which might be described as : "Sans peur et sans proche". We are dealing with the era of the great rench Revolution, when the spirit of scepticism and eligion had led many Catholics astray. The de engys, however, remained staunch to faith and prin-ple, and when French society was artificial to the re, cultivated simplicity and ingenuousness of manner. ney were kind-hearted and charitable towards the or, whom they honoured and served as Jesus Christ the true spirit of Christianity. Indeed, we might say at they carried out in their lives the principle expressed the legend on their coat-of-arms : "Bien faire et laisser re".

Marie Madeleine's grandparents had nineteen children, their third son, Sylvain Charles Pierre de Bengy, being her father. He commanded a corps of the old French Marines and was a knight of the military order of St. Louis. Her mother was beautiful and virtuous.

Monsieur and Madame de Bengy had five children, three sons and two daughters. Marie Madeleine Victoire was born at Châteauroux in what is now the department of the Indre, on September 21, 1781, and was baptized on the same day in the parish church of St. Denis, now of St. Martial. Her sponsors were her grandfather, the Chevalier Nicholas de Congy, Seigneur de la Presle, and her aunt, Madame Marie de Sonmard de Villeneuve. Her godfather carried her from the baptismal font to the Lady Chapel, and placing her on the altar dedicated her with the faith and devotion of olden days to the Blessed Mother of God. In after years Madame de Bonnault d'Houet loved to visit this church where she became, as she used to say, not only a child of God, but also a child of Mary.

Little Victoire was a precocious child. When three years old she knew how to read and took a keen interest in Bible stories. People smiled when they saw her kneeling over the great folio volume and tracing with her tiny fingers every line of the page from top to bottom.

Let us not imagine that this chosen child was faultless. She had the natural shortcomings of her age and was quite human enough to be sometimes a very naughty little girl; but even her faults were those of a noble character, "les défauts de ses qualités". As she grew older, virtue enabled her to conquer these strong natural tendencies. One day, when scarcely three years old, she had to take a dose of medicine. Her father, to

ncourage her, put the glass to his own lips ; but no, she efused. "I won't take it now," she said, "it's only your eavings." Monsieur de Bengy shook his head ; "I ee that my little girl is not good to-day," he said. "I ope my boy will be a better child"—a son had just een born to him. "Oh ! I shall soon know how to nake him naughty too," was the tiny culprit's defiant eply. At this time her mother wrote of her : "As to ur little girl, she is sometimes a bit tiresome, but," she mmediately adds, with a mother's tenderness, "she is nore often a little angel". Madame de Bengy was too nlightened and prudent a woman to make light, as nwise parents often do, of her little daughter's childish aults. She realized that the formation of character can- ot begin too soon, and she corrected her little girl firmly et gently, so as to instil into her a love and appreciation f what is good. Hence, we are not surprised to hear hat from her earliest years Victoire was full of faith and iety. She went to church gladly and took pleasure n the services. One day whilst she was kneeling n church beside her mother, a friend of the family, s he passed their seat, gave her a kiss and said good norning. The little girl rose quickly and replied in a eproachful tone : "People should not speak in church". To the child, talking in God's presence seemed an utrage.

In the early years of Victoire's life the Abbé Claveau, who afterwards became Administrator of the Cathedral f Bourges, was living in seclusion at the residence of Monsieur de Bengy. While acting as chaplain and onfessor to the family he devoted his leisure to the nstruction of the little girl, who, even in her first con- ession, gave proofs of that extreme delicacy and sensi- veness of conscience which never forsook her. When

preparing for confession she remembered she had made faces at the good Abbé. Accordingly she accused herself of having made fun of some one. But feeling that that avowal was insufficient, she returned and said that the person of whom she had made fun was a priest. Her conscience was still ill at ease, so the third time she confessed, explaining that the priest in question was the Abbé himself. "This time," she said, "I was quite satisfied."

In 1791 Victoire, then in her tenth year, made her first Communion; Abbé Claveau instructed her and presided at this solemn event in her young life. The family were then living in the country to escape the dangers of the Revolution. Shortly afterwards, to preserve his life, the Abbé had to flee to Italy, and the de Bengy family took refuge in a secluded part of the country, where they remained eighteen months without seeing a priest. Victoire's piety did not suffer from this spiritual famine, for, as soon as opportunity again offered, she hastened to avail herself of it, and ever after persevered through life in the fervent and regular reception of the Sacraments.

Madame de Bengy, like a true Christian, realized the responsibilities of motherhood, and while her children were young was their only teacher. Under the guidance of her mother, Victoire developed habits of order and economy and learned to sew. One can imagine that such duties were often irksome to the lively little girl, but she was always light-hearted—in fact, the life and sunshine of the household; and whatever her personal likes and dislikes were, she never tried to get out of appointed tasks. She loved her father with special tenderness in these early years, and, through life, as we shall see, he always kept the foremost place

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BIRTHPLACE OF VISCOUNTESS DE BONNAULT D'HOUET

Born Sept. 21, 1781

By permission of C. Paillart, Abbeville, France

CHURCH OF ST. MARTIAL AT CHÂTEAUROUX (INDRE), WHERE VISCOUNTESS DE BONNAULT D'HOUET WAS BAPTISED, SEPT. 21, 1781

in her heart. At the outburst of the Revolution Monsieur de Bengy, sharing the fate of the French *noblesse*, was cast into prison. His wife, the type of a valiant woman of Catholic France, did not lose heart under this misfortune. She was determined to rescue him and engaged her children to join in a novena for his release. "I made this novena with all my heart," Mlle. de Bengy tells us, "but I was praying to be imprisoned myself with my father and to die a martyr. If my mother had only known, I wonder what she would have said." God, however, who had other designs on Victoire, restored Monsieur de Bengy to his family and preserved him and his through the perilous years that followed.

While in the country, in exile, as it were, Victoire was called upon to help her mother in managing the servants and in household matters generally. The experience she thus gained was of much value to her later on. Her tact and discretion, far beyond her years, surprised all, and even in these early days she showed signs of that moral courage and strength of character which in after life enabled her to carry out the will of God and accomplish her difficult mission. Obstacles, far from daunting her, seemed to spur her on to fresh efforts, so that it became a common remark among her parents and friends: "If Victoire has made up her mind to do a thing, she will carry it through". No feelings but those of duty and obedience to God's law could bend her strong will; other considerations had no weight. Yet there was a gentle side to her character. Being of a lovable and generous nature, she was touchingly responsive to the smallest act of kindness, self-forgetful and ever ready to render a service and oblige. Her manners were attractive, and though

full of life and spirits, she showed a certain dignity and graciousness not often found in one so vivacious.

The disturbed state of France during Victoire's early years hindered her from receiving a regular course of school training. She made up for this lack of methodical instruction by reading and private study; and being gifted with a receptive, retentive memory and sound judgment, she became thoroughly well informed. She had a nice and discriminating taste in literature, loved poetry, and wrote verses which showed delicacy of feeling and originality of thought. Moreover, her temperament was artistic. She played the harp with taste and expression. Her harp is now preserved with reverent affection by the Faithful Companions of Jesus at their mother-house.

Such was Victoire at the age of sixteen. The de Bengy family had just removed to Issoudun in the department of the Indre, when she was attacked with a serious illness which threatened to bring her life to a premature close. On being told of her danger she at once resigned herself to death. God, however, did not ask this sacrifice from her. He had other designs, and reserved her for a long life of trials and difficulties. After her recovery a spark of that zeal which was later to consume her manifested itself. Accompanied by Mademoiselle Lesève, a pious girl of humble extraction, she devoted herself to visiting and comforting the sick poor.

About this time, too, Victoire became acquainted with Mademoiselle Constance Rochfort, who was two years her junior. Her new friend was not naturally religious, but Victoire's charitable zeal was contagious, and in course of time the two young girls vied with each other in their good works. They heard Mass and received the Sacraments as often as they could, and it

was their sweetest pleasure to visit the poor in their homes, and to comfort the sick and to perform the humblest offices of charity for patients in the hospital. During these visits, indignant at the sight of the nurses' appropriating the delicacies and even the necessaries intended for the patients, they promptly informed the authorities, and the abuse was inquired into and remedied.

Mademoiselle de Bengy married when she was twenty-three, having, as was usual in France, left this important matter entirely in the hands of her father. Amongst the claimants to her hand was the Viscount de Bonnault d'Houet. Monsieur de Bengy favoured his suit, and, as subsequent events proved, a beneficent Providence had guided this choice.[1] The wedding took place on August 21, 1804, and the young couple settled at Bourges, where shortly afterwards they were

[1] The de Bonnault family too boasted of ancestors, true to God and country, who, like the de Bengys in Crusade days, fought under the banner of the cross. On their coat-of-arms is seen a dolphin "crowned".

This distinction is accounted for as follows: We read in the family archives that Jehan de Bonnault was a noble of the royal household of Charles VII. Through troublous days, when France was a prey to the usurpation of her English foes, and French allegiance was sorely tried, Jehan de Bonnault remained faithful to "le gentil dauphin," fighting by his side under the white banner of Blessed Joan of Arc. And, when on July 17, 1429, beneath the vast dome of the historic Rheims Cathedral, the "Warrior Maiden" stood beside her King, and the Archbishop placed the crown of St. Louis on his head, among the loyal mail-clad warriors who cried "Vive le Roi" was Jehan de Bonnault.

To reward this fidelity and the special services he had rendered in bringing about the coronation—"le sacre du roi"—that action divinely appointed as the term of Joan of Arc's inspired mission—Charles VII enriched the de Bonnault escutcheon with a "crowned dolphin," a unique distinction.

followed by the de Bengy family. A happier pair than Monsieur and Madame de Bonnault cannot be imagined. Both were ardent Catholics, both were imbued with the same principles, the same sympathies, the same tastes, and the same open-hearted charity. Monsieur de Bonnault rivalled his wife in almsgiving. He was blamed by many for his excessive generosity, and his own father remonstrated with him on the subject. "Do not be anxious," was his reply, "I am investing my money at good interest." He thoroughly appreciated his wife's noble qualities and used to say to her: "If God gives us a daughter, bring her up as your mother brought you up". But their happiness, like most things here below, was short-lived. Does not the following incident seem to have been a little warning sent to them by God? One evening Monsieur and Madame de Bonnault were going together over the life of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, for daily spiritual reading was one of their practices of piety. When they reached the passage in which the author insists that God no doubt took the Baron de Chantal from this world in order to carry out his own designs on the Baroness, Monsieur de Bonnault remarked with a smile, though his voice betrayed uneasiness: "I should not have cared to have married such a wife; I should have had to die too soon". Nevertheless, this was precisely what God in his wisdom had decreed. The young Viscount's health began to fail, and after six months' illness he passed away on July 1, 1805. His wife had nursed him with devoted love, and had undertaken, when all hope of recovery was abandoned, to prepare her young husband for his passage beyond the veil.

Victoire's happy married life had lasted but ten short months. God, however, consoled the young widow, then

only twenty-four years of age, by giving her a son. The child was born on September 23, and carried to the baptismal font on the same day, where he received the name of Sylvain Antoine Eugène. Henceforth, her boy became the object of her deepest affection and tenderest care. This loving mother would delegate to no one the sweet task of watching over his early years, and she impressed upon him her own strong principles of religion and virtue. Day by day, as she devoted herself to her child, she endeared herself more and more to her husband's family.[1]

In spite of her piety and zeal for good works, Madame de Bonnault, both before and after her marriage, found the world most attractive. Dress, balls, theatres—she enjoyed them all. She went into society more than any other member of her family, and gave herself up to amusement

[1] Marie Sylvain Antoine Eugène, Viscount de Bonnault d'Houet, was born on September 23, 1805. After the completion of his education, he inherited the family estates and married on January 19, 1835, Louise Bosquillon d'Aubercourt, at Montdidier. Three sons were born to the Viscount and Viscountess:—

1. Leon Marie Antoine Joseph, born October 26, 1835, who married on October 17, 1865, Claudine d'Offoy.

2. Joseph Marie, born February 6, 1837, who died at the age of eighteen on February 11, 1855.

3. Marie Louis Xavier, born November 24, 1847, who married Henriette Esmangard de Bournonville on November 27, 1878.

Viscount de Bonnault d'Houet throughout life held most friendly and cordial relations with the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, both before and after his mother's death. He died at the Château de Hailles in the department of the Somme, on July 1, 1876.

Descendants of the Foundress's grandsons have been in continual relation with her Society up to the present day, 1913.

A nephew of Madame d'Houet's, the Reverend Father Anatole de Bengy, of the Society of Jesus, was one of the priests who suffered martyrdom in 1871—at the epoch of the notorious French Commune.

with her characteristic whole-heartedness. At the same time, she never made pleasure the end-all and the be-all of life, nor was she *worldly* in the common acceptance of the word. Sometimes, we are told, as she was driving off to a ball, she would turn to her younger sister and say with a laugh: "Angèle, say a Hail Mary that I may not miss a single dance".

But very soon God, who was conducting her towards the fulfilment of His purposes, began to make her feel by losses and trials the emptiness and vanity of the world.

One night in a dream she saw a funeral pass her window. "Who is dead?" she asked. "Madame Joseph," was the reply. She was known in Bourges by her husband's baptismal name. Affrighted and surprised, she ran into the streets and asked the same question of several people in turn. Each one made the same reply, "Madame Joseph". Trembling with fear she awoke inspired with a vivid impression of death and of the necessity of making due preparation for it. Another time she dreamt she was in a very beautiful garden in the full bloom of summer. She was plucking the choicest of the flowers, admiring their beauty and inhaling their fragrance, when suddenly she beheld, advancing towards her with slow and measured steps, from the end of the garden, a hideous monster. Horrorstruck at first, she was reassured on noticing several doors in the garden walls, through which she thought she could easily escape, so continued amusing herself and tripped from flower to flower, from time to time nevertheless casting uneasy glances at the approaching monster. A last look showing him to be quite close upon her, she sought to escape by the nearest opening, but to her horror found that the doors were

merely painted. She dashed forward to take refuge in an arbour, but the monster blocked her advance. She thought herself lost and was trembling from head to foot. Then the monster addressed her in these words: "Do not be alarmed, Madame, this is but an allegory. Listen to its meaning. The garden is an image of the world. In youth one views it bestrewn with pleasures and full of attractive flowers. Each one is bent on gathering them, forgetful that death is dogging his steps, and always fancying that he may escape by some means or other. Death comes at last, and men recognize too late that they have been under a fatal delusion".

This dream made a great impression upon the young widow. Still, when her time of mourning was over, she began to entertain anew, although from this time she had given up going to the theatre. Some years later she entirely renounced all worldly pleasure and embraced with boundless generosity the path of perfection to which God was calling her.

In 1809, four years after her husband's death, her self-sacrificing charity suggested an heroic act. Some Spanish prisoners of war, then quartered at Bourges, were attacked by cholera, Madame de Bonnault, hiding her intentions from her family and listening only to the dictates of charity and zeal, disguised herself as a peasant and offered herself at the hospital as a nurse. She was not recognized and her services were accepted. She kept her post for ten days, when she began to feel the symptoms of the disease herself. Returning home she confided her secret to her sister who immediately sent for a doctor. Madame de Bonnault asked him what he thought of her condition. The answer alarmed her; so she at once sent for a holy priest, a stranger to Bourges,

made a general confession, had her will drawn up, and asked her sister to have her son taken to their father's home. She next begged her to take a certain sum of money from her writing desk, which she said she held in charge for the poor, and sent her to distribute it. An hour later she lost consciousness, became delirious, and for a fortnight was in imminent danger. A Sister of Charity who had worked side by side with Madame de Bonnault, and had also contracted the disease, died. But Madame de Bonnault was restored to health after several weeks of suspense and anxiety.

During this illness which nearly proved fatal to Madame de Bengy's eldest daughter, that good mother made a solemn promise that if God spared Victoire's life she would never take Angèle to a ball. The promise was in accordance with Angèle's own views and wishes, and the good example was imitated by several families of Bourges belonging, like the de Bengys, to the higher ranks of society.

Madame de Bonnault availed herself of her restored health and strength to devise new means of doing good. One day, she and her youngest brother, Philippe, purchased a number of books of a doubtful or dangerous nature, and passed the evening burning them. They rejoiced in the thought that in doing this God would be less sinned against, and she used to say that the warmth thrown out from the flames of that fire was the most agreeable she had ever felt in her life. When the task was over, brother and sister having assured themselves that the fire was extinguished, retired to rest. What was their astonishment next morning on coming into the room to find a small picture of the Sacred Heart lying on the heap of ashes from the destroyed books. Madame de Bonnault never discovered whence this picture came,

ut she kept it ever afterwards, and when her Society as founded carried it with her in all her journeyings.

Monsieur Philippe de Bengy, speaking of the incident, aid : "I myself was witness of this fact. I was on a isit with my sister and slept in the very room where we ad burnt the books together. We had a discussion s to whether we should destroy Molière's works and ventually decided to do so. The next morning my ister came into my room and showed me the picture. t is certain that no one had entered my room, for I had ocked the door before retiring."

Madame de Bonnault was distinguished through life or her simple, solid, and practical piety. She had a orror of parading her exercises of devotion, and at the me about which we are writing, so that her visits to a eighbouring church might escape remark, she would ometimes go by one street, sometimes by another. An cquaintance, however, discovered this little strategy, and ne day in Madame de Bonnault's presence, took a nischievous delight in disclosing it before a party of riends.

She was careful to avoid that ill-directed devotion hich sacrifices the duties of one's state of life to prac-ces of mere supererogation. For some time she re-used to be enrolled in the scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel, because she had remarked that her great-unt spent a long time every evening reciting the prayers f the Confraternity, thereby causing unpleasant remarks. These practices of piety are rather difficult to fulfil, so ney are not calculated to encourage one to adopt them," ne used to say. By chance one day she came across Père de la Colombière's sermon on devotion to the capular, and perceived at once the true meaning and dvantages of such practices, if judiciously performed.

She therefore received the scapular herself, and afterwards persuaded her mother and mother-in-law to follow her example. In fine, by her gentle diplomacy, she succeeded in bringing the venerable lady who had been the involuntary cause of her objection into the path of golden moderation and discretion in devotion.

The more Madame de Bonnault detached herself from the world and advanced in the way of perfection, the more she occupied herself with the spiritual needs of others. Her heart already glowed with that zeal for souls which was to be its burning passion through life; and by reason of her superior virtue and high social position her influence was far-reaching. She was often instrumental in bringing about reconciliations, in strengthening wavering vocations, and in winning back negligent Catholics to the practice of their religion. When she desired to obtain a special grace for herself or others, she was wont to say to her sister Angèle, who by this time (1810) had become Madame de Champigny: "Let us strengthen our forces," by which she meant: Let us give extra alms to the poor.[1]

At this period of sad memories, when Italian cardinals and priests were exiled from their native land because faithful to their duty and to the Sovereign Pontiff, thirty of them took refuge in Bourges. This event furnished Madame de Bonnault with an opportunity of again displaying her zeal and charity. Amongst the noble band of Italian exiles was the Abbé Mancini, afterwards

[1] It is interesting to note that among the members of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus is a direct descendant of Madame de Champigny—their Foundress's sister, to whom reference is several times made in this volume. Throughout life the loved Angèle of early days remained deeply attached to her saintly sister, though their paths lay far apart.

Archbishop of Siena, whom she induced to take shelter under her hospitable roof. When conducting him over the house along with his intimate friend, the Abbé Groberto, whom she had also invited to stay with her, she begged him to look upon the suite of rooms set apart for him as his own, to make himself perfectly at home, and to welcome his colleagues as often as he wished. She spared no pains in contributing to the comfort and consolation of these worthy priests and, during their year's stay at Bourges, the whole of the better furnished apartments of the house were placed at their disposal, she meanwhile occupying the basement, where, occasionally assisted by sympathetic working women, she attended to the domestic requirements of the exiles. Animated by a spirit of faith, she behaved to her guests with as much care and respect as if she were working for our Lord Himself. Day after day, the year through, the poor priests found their every want anticipated. All was clean and in order, worn garments were replaced by new ones, and every act of kindness was done so delicately and tactfully that no one could have guessed that the benefactress was Madame de Bonnault herself. Many a pardonable *ruse* she perpetrated in order to hide her identity as the generous hostess. For instance, it happened that the Abbé Mancini accidentally broke a clock and was greatly distressed thereat. A servant recounted the matter to her mistress who, unknown to him, sent for a watchmaker when he had retired for the night and had the clock repaired there and then. Next day, the Abbé approached Madame and humbly apologized for his carelessness in breaking the clock, but she, feigning to examine it, reassured him: "I see nothing wrong, it is going all right". Can it be wondered at that her

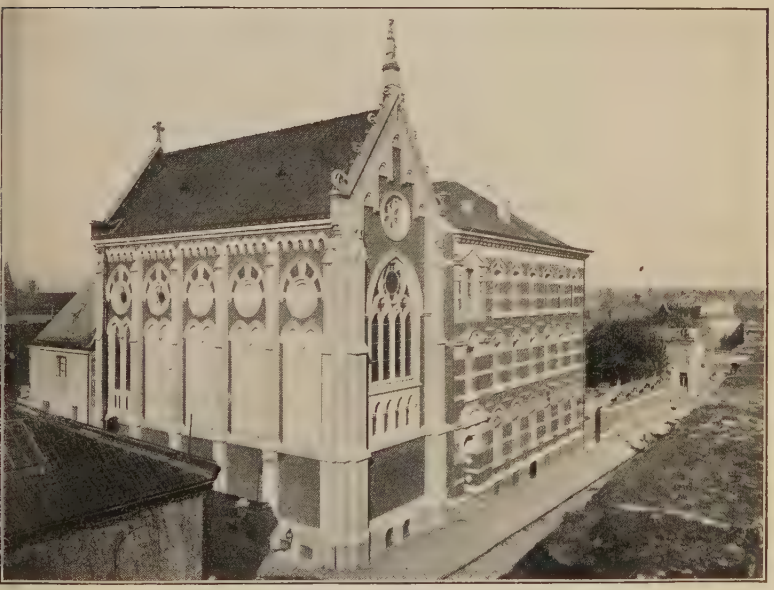
essentially Christian life, full on the one hand of robust self-sacrifice, and gentleness and sweetness on the other, won the esteem and respect of all, especially of those with whom she was on terms of intimacy. Her husband's grandmother held her, one may say, in actual veneration. This pious old lady had been totally blind for many years past, and bore her infirmity with patience and resignation. She cherished, however, always the one heart-burning desire—to obtain from our Lord the recovery of her sight if only for a few moments, so as to gaze once more before she died upon the face of her she admired so much. For the granting of this favour she daily prayed in simplicity of faith and childlike confidence. God answered her fervent appeal to Him. One day when Madame de Bonnault was keeping her company while the other members of the household were attending Mass, the old lady's sight was suddenly restored. To her intense joy, and yet in utter silence, she feasted her eyes on the figure before her, contemplating at leisure the dear features she had so longed to see. Madame de Bonnault was ignorant of the wonderful happening. The old lady kept her holy secret until the day of her death. Then, as she was being encouraged by a priest to have confidence in God, she answered: "I have every reason to have confidence in Him; He has granted my prayers once before and given me a great grace". She then disclosed to the priest the story of the temporary restoration of her eyesight.

By permission of C. Paillart, Abbeville, France

First Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Amiens—"The Cradle of the Society"

Founded 1820

[*See p.* 62]



Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (St. Philomena's), Rue des Augustins, Amiens, France

Founded 1820. New extension built in 1895. School closed by French Government in 1904

[*See p.* 62]

CHAPTER II.

GOD BEGINS TO MANIFEST HIS WILL TO MADAME DE BONNAULT D'HOUET.

1811-1815.

BEFORE entering upon the second phase of Madame de Bonnault d'Houet's life, we place before the reader the following lines which the Abbé Martin found traced by her own hand in one of her manuscripts.

"Pray for me, my dear Sisters," she writes, "and be not grieved at my death. I declare before God that I was as a cipher in the foundation of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, which is entirely and in the strictest sense the work of the Most-High. I began it when God pleased, and I began it without realizing what I was doing or what I wished. The following is all the advice I have to give you: Be exact in observing our holy rules and never allow any of them to be changed. The Lord Himself will then guide you as He has done in the past." This declaration expressed Madame de Bonnault d'Houet's deep and abiding conviction. We find her emphasizing it when, on her bed of death surrounded by her spiritual daughters, she gave them her simple parting instructions.

After quoting her words, the Abbé Martin makes the following reflection: "God," he says, "usually makes use of the lowliest instruments to work out His greatest designs. However, while Madame de Bon-

nault expresses her conviction of this truth, in her humility she does not mention what is equally true, that when He appoints tasks too great for human weakness, he uses those living tools which have been tried and refined by humiliation and self-abnegation. When He has led them in the paths of trial and self-renunciation, His spirit breathes in them and He endows them with a power and with qualities which are not their own but His. As the alchemist uses various tests to discover the value of a metal, so the Almighty employs obedience and self-sacrifice to bring to light the noblest qualities of the soul."

In Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," a poem having about it, as some one has said, the unique thing which makes for immortality, a similar thought is finely expressed :—

> Ah! must——
> Designer infinite!——
> Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

It is well perhaps to notice the apparent anomaly in the names applied to the Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. We have hitherto spoken of her as Madame de Bonnault; henceforth, we shall call her Madame d'Houet. The latter name, derived from a property belonging to her husband, was the one she herself preferred, as it concealed her worldly rank. She was known by it during the greater part of her life, and Abbé Martin always speaks of her as Madame d'Houet.

Though Madame d'Houet had so great a work to accomplish, thirty-eight years of her life were passed amidst the attractions and pleasures of society. Yet though in the world we may say she was not of the world. Her thoughts, her aspirations, and her affec-

ons were fixed on higher things. The last thirty-eight ears of her life were employed in forming a religious ody, which was to extend, in virtue of the impetus erived from its Foundress, the kingdom of Christ on rth. She had no natural desire or inclination to perrm this work; God Himself led her step by step, and ivine grace alone overcame in the end her natural pugnance.

We have seen how from a life which, though Christian d well regulated, was still influenced by worldly conderations God conducted her through various channels, st, to a life of ordinary Christian piety and afterwards one entirely devoted to good works. Her strict lelity to these first calls of Divine grace no doubt erited graces which enabled her to scale the heights perfection. In entering upon this period of her life, anks to the precious memoirs she has left behind, she rself becomes our guide. Perhaps the existence of emoirs coming from the pen of one whose characteristic rtue was humility, and who gloried in being unknown d despised, may seem surprising. As a matter of t, they owe their origin to the voice of obedience. onseigneur Gallien de Châbons, Bishop of Amiens, who ld her in the highest esteem and was her friend and dviser, ordered her to write an account of the foundation her Society. In complying with this command she d to do extreme violence to herself for she had a horror publicity.

"It is for the glory of God and my own confusion, d also in obedience to the command of those who hold od's place in my regard, that I write the history of r Society." So she begins her memoirs. "Its formaon was the work of God, who by means of a chain of ents finally made known His will. I am convinced

that He acted thus to prove that the work was His and not mine, and that He made use of me merely as a skilful workman employs a rude and worthless tool. The first idea of our work came to me through Monsieur Gaudin, my confessor at Bourges.[1]

"I called upon him one day," she writes, "to consult him on matters which did not personally concern me. In speaking of a lady known to me,[2] he said: 'Some day you will resemble her more than you imagine'. I reflected on his words, but could find no point of resemblance in our lives, except perhaps in the faults we had both committed. 'Never mind,' he replied, 'you will see some day that I am right.'

"A few years later, a holy woman with whom I was acquainted came to spend a few days with me. About three hours after she had left my house what was my surprise when I returned home to find her there again. She told me that God had directed her to give me a message. She had not done so, but on leaving my house she had been irresistibly forced to return and execute the command. She concluded in these remarkable words: 'Our dear Lord wishes to give you many special graces, but he requires on your part ready co-operation and the practice of great virtue'. On my seeking an explana-

[1] Monsieur Gaudin is frequently mentioned in our narrative. He was one of the persecuted French priests who refused to take the civil constitutional oath tendered to the clergy. He sought refuge first in Switzerland, and when things were more settled in France, he returned to Bourges, where he exercised a fruitful ministry. An excellent priest, and a prudent man of business, he spent his life in good works, performed in a quiet, unobtrusive manner.

[2] This lady, after having led a life of pleasure, renounced all worldly prospects, and ultimately founded a religious institute not very dissimilar in scope from Madame d'Houet's.

on she merely replied that nothing more definite had een made known to her.

"A short time afterwards I chanced to hear of a holy issioner who had come to Bourges for a short time. any persons came to the town to consult him, and I so sought his advice as to my future. He urged me re-enter the married state and did his utmost to bring e to his views. I was much surprised a few days later receiving a visit from him. He said he had not left e town, as he had spent all his time looking for me, and he did not know my address he had had some difficulty finding me. His object was to withdraw his previous vice, which was displeasing to God and not in accor- nce with His will. 'God wants your whole heart. ou must give it to him without reserve. Such is His ssage to you.'"

Though this visit, with the new and unexpected ad- e it brought, this second message from the Good aster, who thus deigned to ask her for all her love, de a great impression on Madame d'Houet's deeply igious soul, still she was receiving at best but passing hts which disappeared again into the gloom of un- rtainty ere she could discern whither they pointed. o doubt they must have given rise in her to something re than a vague presentiment, and she prepared her l in peace until the voice of the Beloved should say tones not to be misunderstood: "Arise, my beloved e and come!" While she waited for the veiled future unfold itself in a definite manner, she spent herself accomplishing, with the utmost fidelity and perfection, duties of her actual state of life. Ever gracious, able, and cheerful with her dependents, she employed em but little in her own personal service, though she pt them constantly and usefully occupied. After the

example of their virtuous mistress, and under her direction, they made clothes for the poor and supplied the wants of needy churches and priests. Every evening she assembled them and read a passage from some spiritual book which she explained, and then questioning them on the subject-matter, turned an informal meeting into a sort of spiritual conference. The day ended by family prayers. It was an ideal household; and if one could reproach her with anything in the discharge of her duties as its mistress, it would be, as she herself had to acknowledge later, that she was too kind and not sufficiently firm. With the determination of character which we know her to have possessed, we can only attribute this imperfection, if such it may be called, to an excess of consideration for others. Indeed, she herself undertook many tasks in order to spare her servants. In her relations with them, she was more their mother than their mistress. She looked upon them as deposits which her father and her husband had confided to her care, and, in the spirit of the Church, treated them with affection and considerateness as members of the one spiritual family, her greatest solicitude being for the welfare of their souls. It is not surprising, then, that they loved and reverenced her, and called her by an endearing name for which our language has no equivalent! "La Bonne Dame".

At about eighteen miles from Bourges, Madame d'Houet had a somewhat extensive property, called Parassy. There, she was accustomed to pass the autumn. It was an old, unassuming country-seat, very simply furnished, its sole ornaments being some family portraits. The château was surrounded by fields and vineyards and, with the exception of an avenue of hornbeams, seems to have been sparsely wooded. At the

cross-roads in the centre of the hamlet, stood a wooden cross. It was the central point round which were grouped some cottages and a few larger houses. The kindly inhabitants of this old-world spot were all personally known to Madame d'Houet. She was their angel and gave them ready sympathy in the joys and sorrows of their simple lives.

A contemporary tells us that all loved and respected her, and that even to this day her memory is revered and handed down as a precious tradition. When in 1858 the news of the death of "La Bonne Dame" reached Parassy, the people had a solemn Requiem sung for the repose of her soul and wore mourning for a year.

"I have met employees," he says, "who had worked on Madame d'Houet's estate, and who, in their old age, kept up the practice learned from her of reciting during Lent, a certain number of Paters and Aves. It was a tradition they inherited from 'La Bonne Dame,' who taught them that, when the Church granted dispensations from fasting, her children ought to substitute additional prayers. The lives led by these simple people strike us, in this go-ahead world of the twentieth century, as being all but ideal. They began everything by prayer, *naïvely* saying that that 'was the spirit of Madame '."

Towards the epoch at which we have arrived, a mission was given at Bourges by the Fathers of the Faith, a society of zealous priests banded together to stem the tide of immorality and unbelief in France. Madame d'Houet had sought the honour of giving hospitality to the six missioners, and when the mission ended, invited the Fathers to take a rest in her Château of Parassy. Later on she procured the benefit of a mission for the village itself, and not only received the missioners (Jesuit Fathers) under her roof, but defrayed

the expense of the mission. This was her first acquaintance with the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, who in virtue of the bull of their re-establishment were again free to devote themselves to the good of souls. Madame d'Houet welcomed them to her home in the spirit of Martha and Mary, saw to all their wants, and made them feel that, like the Master, they too had their Bethany. But let it not be thought that these good works ever caused her to neglect the obligations of her state of life. She was a devoted mother and gave Eugène de Bonnault all his early lessons.[1]

While Madame d'Houet gave herself to what we may modestly call the academic education of her little boy, she applied herself still more earnestly to his moral training and gently instilled into his young heart a sense of the beauty of virtue and of the greatness of God's love. When he was nine years of age she placed him in more experienced hands, so that the character which she had begun to mould might develop under the best conditions. In 1814, the year in which Pius VII revoked the Bull of Clement XIV, the Jesuits, at the request of Monseigneur de Mandolx, Bishop of Amiens,

[1] A little anecdote shows how she united to a mother's natural tenderness a certain determination in her dealings with her boy. Eugène, at six years of age, could not read. Madame d'Houet had made efforts to teach him, but at the sight of the book the little boy always began to cry. His tears had the desired effect; the reading lesson was discontinued. Madame de Bonnault, his grandmother, noticed this, and one day when petting the child, playfully remarked: "Here is a little boy who is a nice dunce for his age". Then turning to her daughter-in-law, she said: "You must send him to me every day and I'll see if I can manage to teach him to read". Madame d'Houet was confused, and next day she began in good earnest to give Eugène regular lessons, with the result that in two months, in spite of his tears, he could read.

pened the College of St. Acheul destined to become enowned. It was here that Madame d'Houet placed ier son, who was then nine years old. She took him here herself and was among the invited guests at the pening of the new College on November 3, 1814.[1]

We are of opinion that Madame d'Houet's relations with the Fathers of the Faith, at the epoch of the mission at Bourges, were the means of bringing her later on into direct contact with the Society of Jesus; indeed, it was on her journey to Amiens, via Paris, that she first met Father Varin[2] and his Provincial, Father de Clorivières.

Madame d'Houet soon left Amiens for Bourges, where family affairs claimed her attention, but the

[1] Madame d'Houet deeply regretted the suppression of the Society of Jesus. Those who knew her intimately, Canon Mancini, Canon Groberto of Florence, and others, remembered how in her conversations she often expressed a hope that the Sovereign Pontiff, when he was restored to liberty, would call together anew this noble phalanx of the Church. Such widespread hopes were, as we know, realized by the beneficent act of Pius VII in 1814.

[2] Joseph-Désiré Varin de Solmon was born in 1769. He belonged to a noble family of Besançon, and became a secular priest at the Seminary of St. Sulpice. He went into voluntary exile at the time of the Revolution, and in 1794 joined a religious congregation —the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—which had just been established by the Abbé Eleonore de Tournely and Charles de Broglie, fellow-students of his at St. Sulpice. At the death of Father de Tournely in 1797, Father Varin became superior and amalgamated his congregation with that of the Fathers of the Faith founded in Italy by Paccanari. In 1800 Father Varin and his companions gave successful missions in parts of France. Fouché, the French Minister, looked upon them with disfavour, and in 1807 prevailed upon the Emperor to suppress the congregation. Father Varin returned to his family, and left it again, in 1814, to join the re-established Society of Jesus. He died on April 19, 1850.

political disturbances of 1815 alarmed her. Her fears as to the fate of St. Acheul's and, consequently, as to the safety of her son, recalled her to Amiens. She here takes up the thread of the narrative and tells us of the dealings of Providence with the work she was destined to accomplish.

"In 1815, happening to be in Amiens, I wrote to Father Varin and told him, that when passing through Paris, Father de la Clorivières, his Provincial, had given me permission to offer him the shelter of my home, during the time of persecution. The Rector of the College, Father de Jennesseaux, who knew of my proposal, was somewhat amused, and smilingly remarked: 'Father Varin is scarcely likely to choose such a hiding place'. A few days later, Father Rector sent for me. He seemed a little mystified and said: 'I have just received the post from Paris, and, though there is no direct answer to your letter, it seems to me that you ought to leave for Bourges at once. They tell me that Father Varin had only just left the house when your letter arrived; they ran after him with it, but before even opening it, he said to our Fathers: "Do not try to keep me here, or to send me anywhere but to Bourges. God has made me understand in a very positive manner that I am to go there immediately. When I arrive He will tell me what is His will."' Father Jennesseaux then added: 'Father Varin will mention the matter to his Provincial and start for Bourges at once'.

"Though I was far from understanding what it all meant, I felt disturbed. An awful thought flashed through my mind—surely if Father Varin comes to my house, it will mean that I shall have to enter religion, an idea I detested. It was a temptation, but God in

The Reverend Joseph Varin, S.J.
Born February 7, 1769. Died April 19, 1850

His goodness gave me the grace to say 'Fiat' even to this; and I offered myself without reserve for the doing of His holy will.

"Father Varin spent about five months with me at Bourges. An order from the local authorities obliging all householders to report the names of those in their houses, forced us to retire to my country-seat. It seemed clear that our Lord in His mercy had sent this holy Jesuit for my guidance alone, for, being free from all social ties and obligations at Parassy, I was able to drink in the lessons of sanctity and virtue which welled from his lips. His conversations turned less on the Society to which he belonged, than on the interior spirit which should animate its members."

Madame d'Houet does not give further details of these spiritual interviews between herself and Father Varin. It is clear that she then had no idea of founding a religious congregation, nor any intention of embracing the religious life. It is likewise clear in the face of certain well-known facts, that Father Varin himself had then no notion that his hostess was to be the foundress of a new religious congregation. Nevertheless, twenty years later, he said to one who mentioned her name: "Madame de Bonnault d'Houet! I know her very well. What she is now doing, we began together in 1815." A few years later he made the same assertion with more details, and recalled his sojourn at Parassy in that same year. Madame d'Houet herself, though she was unaware of Father Varin's like opinion, agreed in considering this period as the beginning of her Society.

Our Lord has not allowed the mysterious intercourse which took place between the souls of these two holy persons to be revealed, but it is certain that they

themselves held the remembrance sacred. The conversations which they had together inflamed Madame d'Houet with a strong personal love for our Lord, and the Sacramental Presence of Jesus in their midst contributed powerfully to render their spiritual relations fruitful and effective of good.

Madame d'Houet transformed the finest room in her château into an oratory, where Father Varin said his daily Mass and where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. Both the hostess and her priestly guest often paid long visits to Jesus hidden beneath the Eucharistic veil. Later on she used to relate to her spiritual daughters how, on one occasion, she had risen in the night and without the slightest noise had crept into the little chapel to hold secret communion with God. The sanctuary lamp burned softly and faintly, the dimmed light concealing her presence from all save "Him" whom she sought. From her glowing heart, like the Spouse in the Canticles, love-laden words escaped. As she thus knelt giving free utterance to her devotion, she chanced to look towards one of the angles of the little sanctuary, and beheld through the semi-obscurity, the form of Father Varin whom fervour had also drawn thither. He remained immovable, for he too would fain have it that his nightly vigil be the secret of the King.

On the return of Louis XVIII to Paris, the army of the Loire arrived in the neighbourhood of Parassy. Monsieur de Bengy was alarmed for his daughter's security and wrote begging her to return directly to Bourges. Father Varin would not hear of such a step, and insisted that it was God's will she should remain in the country to protect her retainers and estate. "He assures me," she writes to her father, "that nobody will come near us, or, if they do, not only will they *not* harm

us, but they will protect us, and, though he can return to Paris with perfect safety, he means to remain with me until the troops have gone to a distance or are disbanded." The sequel shows that he was not mistaken.

When Monsieur de Bengy received his daughter's reply, he was reassured and replied in words which breathe the virile faith of an old-world type: "When a man like Father Varin speaks thus, one must not doubt. Tell him I have no further fear: I leave you entirely under his care." Yet terror was rampant in the neighbourhood, and the mayor of the district came hourly to the château bringing more and more startling news. Father Varin listened to all these sinister reports, and kept up the confidence of the household by his inspiring words: "Have confidence; you know what I have promised you. The soldiers will not come, or, if they do, it will be to protect and not to harm you."

At last the soldiers made their appearance at Parassy and presented themselves at the château to be billeted. Acting on the advice of Father Varin, Madame d'Houet received them courteously and hospitably. She told them that she placed the entire house at their disposal with the exception of two apartments, one reserved for her own use, the other for a friend, a priest who happened to be staying with her. At first they acted in a curt, uncivil manner, not uncommon with soldiers under arms, and treated the château as their barracks. "I was terrified," she writes later, "and as I was praying to our Lord silently in my heart, the Colonel suddenly turned to one of the windows and noticing some high buildings in the distance, asked me what they were: I replied 'The town of Bourges'. 'Ah,' he replied, 'I shall go to Bourges in a few days to see an old friend of

mine, Monsieur de Bengy.' 'That is my father,' I replied quickly. 'Your father,' he answered sarcastically. 'I knew Monsieur de Bengy at the École Polytechnique, and do you imagine your father was a fellow-student of mine?' 'Well then,' I answered, 'it was my brother.' 'It was neither your father nor your brother,' he brusquely rejoined. I happened to have a sketch done by my brother when he was studying at the École Polytechnique, and signed by him, so I showed it to the Colonel. The instant he saw it, he exclaimed joyfully: 'Oh! yes, I recognize the sketch, he did it as we sat together and there is his signature. What! Are you really de Bengy's sister? Oh! how happy I am to be in a position to help you. I have to acknowledge, Madame, that your position was not only unpleasant, but dangerous. Now let the Mayor of the district be called at once, and I shall make my arrangements with him. I shall name the officers who are to be quartered here, and in order to lessen our numbers we can send our orderlies to your gardener's house. I take your château, estate, and the whole district under my protection. I promise you that nothing untoward shall occur.'

"I then asked Father Varin to come to us, and in the presence of the colonel and his staff told him what had taken place. He looked at me with a gentle smile which seemed to say: 'Well, did I deceive you'? During the three weeks which the officers spent in my house, they showed gentlemanly consideration and respect, forestalling one another in their deference to Father Varin. If by chance they were at the dining table before him, they remained standing until he took his place. So it came to pass that this military contingent, whose arrival I had so much dreaded, protected not only my house and property, but the entire district. We

had just reason to be grateful to God, for no other part of Berry escaped."[1]

Father Varin left Parassy immediately after this event. His leaving was a painful sacrifice for Madame d'Houet, but our Lord made her realize even at this period of her life, that He alone can fully satisfy the cravings of the human heart. She thus speaks of the event: "It was truly an unspeakable sorrow to me when the moment came for Father Varin to return to Paris. I had been so accustomed to hear him discourse on God with the love and unction so peculiarly his own, that I shuddered to think of the void I knew his absence would make. I looked upon him not as a mere creature, but as the visible image of our Lord. So closely did he bring the Sacred Presence to my mind, that when he was referred to as 'Father Varin,' I had to think who was meant. God helped me to bear this trial bravely, for even my confessor, Monsieur Gaudin, was astonished and reproached me for assuming an indifference which, he said, I did not feel. He did his best to force me to own that I was broken-hearted.

"One day, as I was praying after Holy Communion, I distinctly heard the following words: 'My child, am I not sufficient to replace a mortal man? Who is Father Varin? My instrument and nothing more. He came to you at my bidding and left you when I willed.'

"Both before and after Father Varin's stay with me

[1] The harvest this year had been a very good one and Madame d'Houet had gathered large crops. When one reads of the looting of the military in times of bivouac, one marvels at the fact that her granaries remained unmolested by the soldiery. As a matter of fact, the sale of this same garnered grain served later on for the purchase of her first convent at Amiens.

at Bourges, our Lord made me realize that I was not to form a human attachment for him. I felt that the bond of friendship which united us had its source in God and that He interposed Himself between us, lest a natural affection should arise and thus destroy the spiritual relationship which existed between his soul and mine. He was only lent to me for a time in order to lead me towards my goal.'

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, NANTES, FRANCE

Founded 1825. School closed by French Government in 1905

[*See p.* 117]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, SAINTE-ANNE-D'AURAY, MORBIHAN, FRANCE

Founded 1826. School closed by French Government in 1906

[*See p.* 121]

CHAPTER III.

GOD MAKES HIS WILL KNOWN MORE CLEARLY. GREAT TRIALS.

1816-1817.

Since Madame d'Houet had placed her son at St. Acheul's, she had lived alternately at Amiens and at Bourges. Her duty to her family, her own interests and those of her son claimed her presence at Bourges during part of the year, while a mother's heart attracted her to Amiens and detained her there as long as possible. Besides, since the gentle whisperings of grace had been inviting her to advance in the path of the perfect life, she was glad to profit at Amiens by spiritual resources and helps denied her at Bourges. Again, it was easier for her to lead a life more completely separated from the world and more entirely devoted to God at a distance from her family and friends.

When she was in Bourges she considered it her duty to keep up her social relations. She went into society, and by natural taste and inclination still enjoyed amusement. However, more than ever now, she sanctified her actions (and in these the ball and worldly séances played their part) by a very pure intention.

At Amiens she was known merely as "Madame d'Houet". This name if it favoured, as we have already pointed out, her spirit of humility and her sincere contempt for worldly greatness and lineage led, nevertheless,

to many misunderstandings which she never thought it worth while to explain away.

She had rooms in the convent of the nuns of the Holy Family, and divided her time between prayer and good works. "How beautiful it was," writes an eye-witness of her life at this period, "to see her during long hours prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament. So absorbed was she in prayer that one shrank from approaching her. Her bent head, her motionless form, all seemed to say: 'Creatures depart, and leave me alone with my God'. Like the Prophet King of old, she too could have exclaimed in the ardour of her love: 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so doth my soul pant after Thee, O my God'. But it was, above all, when she was in close union with our Lord after Holy Communion that her features became aglow with the burning love which consumed her heart. Her whole being was, as it were, annihilated in His presence. After Mass she usually went to the Altar of Our Lady, and there made her thanksgiving. She thought herself alone on such occasions, and was totally unconscious that others, attracted by her fervour, came into the chapel to be edified by her devotion. The time which was not occupied in works of charity, she employed in making vestments and ornaments for the altar."

She spent the greater part of 1816 at Amiens, with the exception of the summer holidays, which she passed with her boy in Berry. She took Eugène back to St. Acheul's for the re-opening of classes in October, but before she returned to Bourges for the winter months, she made a retreat under the direction of Father Sellier, to whose spiritual guidance Father Varin had confided her.[1]

[1] Father Antoine Fabien Sellier was born near Amiens on July 26, 1772. He joined, in 1799, the Association of the Fathers of

She tells us in her memoirs, that God Himself directed this retreat, for she says *naïvely:* "I misunderstood Father Sellier and thought he had forbidden me to go to Confession before the end of the retreat, so when I presented myself on the last day, he reprimanded me severely for not coming before. He wound up, however, by saying that he was convinced God intended to bestow special marks of love and mercy upon me. He advised me to lead a more perfect life and to make the vow of chastity. I absolutely refused to do either, persisting that I could not act without Father Varin's advice, and that he had positively forbidden me to change anything in my way of life. Seeing that he could not persuade me he raised his eyes to heaven, and uttered this prayer aloud in my presence: 'My God, do not abandon this soul, I beseech Thee, but grant that she may experience such disgust amid the pleasures of the world, as may impel her to give herself to Thee alone'. Father Sellier then turned to me saying that God had made known to him that I would eventually do the two things he had asked me, but that the time had not yet come—in fact, that his own proposal had been premature.

"When I saw Father Varin in Paris I related what had occurred. He said: 'What does Father Sellier mean by interfering and giving such advice? No, remain as you are.' I must, however, add, in deference to Father Sellier's suggestion, that God heard his

the Faith which had its birth in Germany to keep up the spirit of Saint Ignatius. When the Society of Jesus was re-established in 1813, Father Sellier and his fellow-labourers, under the lead of Father Varin, joined it. While at the College of Saint Acheul, near Amiens, he came into contact with Madame d'Houet. After a long and fruitful life he died at Saint Acheul's on 14 March, 1854.

prayer, for on my return to Bourges, I felt the utmost weariness and distaste for amusement, and to such a degree was I disillusioned that I found it impossible to mix again in society.

"I omitted to say that during my retreat, which took place during the Octave of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Feast, I received a sweet and clear intimation that God wished me to embrace the religious state, not, as I at one time thought, by joining the Carmelites, but by working actively for the salvation of souls. I confided this to Father Varin on my return. He was overjoyed at the news and said: 'Our Lord has then at last heard my prayer'. He then spoke to me of the Institute of the Sacred Heart with which he was intimately connected, and said that he had reason to believe that God called me there. The same idea had occurred to me myself, but I had attached little importance to it. Whilst he was speaking to me, an interior voice most emphatically pronounced the words: 'No, that will not take place'. I must have shown some emotion. Father Varin asked me what was the matter. I told him. He was annoyed, and bade me attach no importance to such fancies. He wanted me to read the rules of the Institute, advised me to visit the religious frequently, and did all in his power to induce me to join them. One day when I was exceedingly troubled on the subject, Father Varin ended by saying that he had no wish to force me to enter with the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. I could not resist replying: 'Father, if you wish it, and if I wish it, what good will that be, if God does not wish it'. I was convinced that God had other designs; nevertheless, had Father Varin insisted, I would have joined the Institute of the Sacred Heart at once. Immediately after my return to Bourges, one Sunday after Holy

Communion, I distinctly heard a voice from the tabernacle which said: 'Ask of Me what thou wilt'. I reflected and replied: 'My God, I desire nothing but the accomplishment of Thy Holy Will in me'. The voice then repeated the same demand; I then thought of Eugène, and having again reflected, I said once more: 'My God, I desire for him also nothing but Thy Holy Will'. The same voice continued! 'Repeat these words: My God, I desire both for myself and my son nothing but the accomplishment of Thy Holy Will; grant me the grace to fulfil it as soon as it shall be made known to me'.

"During the early part of 1817 I returned to Amiens. As I passed through Paris I called on Father Varin, who was not very well. His superiors were sending him to St. Acheul's for a short change, and I had the privilege of travelling with him and one of the brothers of the Society. A short time later he invited me to join in a pilgrimage which he and some nuns were making to the shrine at Berbières. On our arrival he took me aside and advised me to address to God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the very prayer which had been taught to me after Holy Communion, i.e. 'Give me the grace to accomplish Thy Holy Will with fidelity, as soon as it shall be known to me!' He added the words 'with fidelity'. The coincidence was strange, for I had never mentioned the matter to Father Varin.

"A month later he returned to Paris, and I went to bid him farewell. We had a long conversation, at the conclusion of which he said: 'Think now, my child, if there be anything that troubles you, for I shall have no further opportunity of speaking to you before I start for Paris'. I could think of nothing. When I left him I went into the church, and whilst praying it was clearly

made known to me that God desired me to make the vow of chastity at that very moment in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Grace urged me so forcibly that, in spite of the natural aversion I had felt up to the present, I could no longer resist. I merely said that I could not make this vow without my confessor's permission. I felt that God approved of this, for I was bidden to make the vow at once conditionally, so that it would be valid only if the confessor approved. I also felt forced to promise that I would renew this vow on a day which the confessor would fix. No longer experiencing any repugnance, I gladly and promptly made the vow. This took place on the Feast of the Holy Trinity in the year 1817. It was then made known to me that I should not have an opportunity of mentioning the matter to Father Varin before his departure, but that I was to speak of it first to Father Sellier. It seemed to me too that this deference was due to him, as he had first suggested my making the vow. When Mass was over, alarmed at what had happened, I determined to tell Father Varin at once. I had a great fear of anything extraordinary happening to me, and was anxious to make sure whether what had taken place was from God or merely a delusion. I did my utmost during the day to get a chance of saying a few words to Father Varin, but though I met him several times my every effort was baffled. Next morning I went to an early Mass at St. Acheul's with the intention of speaking to him at any cost. I found him in the avenue saying his office. He stopped reading for an instant and said: 'Come to the Sacred Heart Convent. When you have assisted at my Mass we will breakfast together.' I did so and sat next to him at table. I took occasion to say in an undertone: 'Father, I have something most important to tell you,

I shall be inconsolable if I cannot speak to you'. He replied most reassuringly: 'Do not fear, I will speak to you after breakfast without fail'. The good Father remained for some time discoursing of God with his usual sweetness and unction. Several of the nuns came in to say good-bye to him, and at last he rose from the table to speak to one of them apart. I stopped him and said: 'Father, you will not forget your promise'. He again reassured me. The Mother-Superior and another of the nuns were to travel with him and were awaiting him. I saw that the horses were being harnessed, and presently the two nuns seated themselves in the carriage and Father Varin was still with the person who had called him from table. I was in an agony of fear and placed myself in a position to block his passage to the carriage. The Mother-Superior was amused at my distress and said: 'Do not be so anxious; the Father is sure to speak to you before he goes'. But suddenly he rushed from the passage where he stood, got quickly into the carriage, saluted us, and drove away. I cannot express what I went through at that moment. The nuns could not understand why I was so disappointed. They laughed at me and bade me be comforted, for I was sure to meet him at Paris in a month's time.

"Next day I visited Father Sellier and told him all that had happened. He comforted me and said that, as far as he was concerned, the news gave him great pleasure. Some time after, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, I was waiting to hear Mass at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and while reflecting on the happiness of those who were entirely devoted to God's service, I felt a pang of regret that I was not called to His immediate and sweet service among the Carmelites. Suddenly, whilst absorbed in these thoughts, I distinctly heard a voice pro-

ceeding from the crucifix over the tabernacle and uttering the words : 'I thirst'. My soul was stirred to its inmost depths with reverence and awe. I fell upon my knees and offered myself to our Lord with all my heart for the accomplishment of His adorable Will. Father Sellier, to whom I related what had happened, advised me to pay the utmost attention to the words which I had heard, and to beg our dear Lord very earnestly for an explanation, assuring me that he himself would pray for that intention. 'I give you a week,' he said. 'Come to me on Monday morning, whether you have anything to tell me or not.'

"I was exact in doing as he bade me, but received no further revelation. Monday morning came, and I remembered that Father Sellier had told me to go to Confession. I had nothing particular to say, which I must own was a relief rather than otherwise. Whilst debating within myself whether I should go to church or not, suddenly, for the space of a moment, a scroll seemed to unroll itself before me mentally, and I saw inscribed in distinct characters the four things which God required of me. Firstly, I was to be a Companion of Jesus. Secondly, I was to found establishments for the education of children. Thirdly, I and my companions were to devote ourselves to the good of our neighbours in foreign countries. Fourthly, I was to have retreats given in our houses for the benefit of persons in the world.

"When I had related all this to Father Sellier, he told me that I might rest assured that God had made His Will known to me concerning these matters. 'I have not the least doubt that they will in time be fully and entirely realized,' he rejoined, urging me to persevere in prayer, and to offer myself to God with goodwill to obey Him in all things."

Madame d'Houet then says that, at this same epoch, God asked four things of her personally. She does not name them, but a slip of paper in her own handwriting fortunately supplies the blank.

"I have learned that the four things which God asks of me are :—

"1. Always to be so united to Him as to be lost in Him.

"2. To desire only the accomplishment of His holy Will.

"3. To remain undisturbed in His hands, ready to do all He requires.

"I asked for a fourth thing, and I was answered : 'Be ever in God's presence as an empty vessel ready to receive all that it may please Him to place therein'. All this happened within the Octave of St. Aloysius' Feast, and it struck me as a coincidence, for the first thoughts of what God had asked of me had come to my mind during the Octave of St. Stanislaus's Feast.

"Some days later, as I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, God's Will was communicated to me on all these subjects. I was shown that I must be willing to suffer, and even to allow myself to be trodden upon and despised for the salvation of souls. The Blessed Virgin was to be the future Superior of this Society. There was something inexpressibly sweet and gentle in the manner in which these manifestations were made known to me ; and my soul, as I drank in the heavenly draughts, was inundated with sweetness and comfort. Our Lord on this occasion, as it were, implored me to do what He asked, whereas, on other occasions, He had dealt forcibly with me, manifesting His wishes with authority, and without inviting my acquiescence, saying directly, 'It is My Will, My child'.

"On July 2, the Feast of Our Lady's Visitation, while on my way to hear Mass at St. Acheul's, I was pondering over an instruction which I had heard on this mystery the preceding evening. All at once an interior voice said to me: 'You will have three companions, who must be very dear to you and whom you must never leave for a single instant. I listened for the names of these three companions, and I was told that they were "Humility, Poverty, and Obedience". Father Sellier had once suggested that when three graces were granted to me, it would be well to ask for a fourth. I made the request interiorly on the spur of the moment, and was answered: 'Gentleness'.

"When I had related this to Father Sellier, he said I was to attach no importance whatever to it, for he believed it did not come from God. I promised to dismiss the thought, but the next morning after Mass he sent for me and said: 'God was displeased with me for the advice I gave you yesterday. He commands me to assure you that all the things which were revealed to you were true, and the expression of His Will'."

It was thus that our Lord, in a series of gradual lights, revealed little by little His designs to His faithful servant.

A fresh interior guidance was to trace out her path on more definite lines, but in order to understand its bearing on this momentous epoch of her life, certain explanations are necessary.

From the time of her first visit to Amiens, Madame d'Houet had conceived a profound veneration and deep religious affection for the Fathers of the Society of Jesus—to whose care she had confided her son.[1]

[1] One of her greatest longings always had been to come into contact with saints. Nothing else excited her curiosity. If her

In each member of the reorganized Society of Jesus it seemed to her that she beheld another "Jesus Christ," as she herself confessed to Father Varin. Nor did she ever let an opportunity escape of expressing her admiration and reverence for them. His visit to her château at Parassy served only to deepen and strengthen her esteem for the Society to which he belonged. Very soon her generous soul, thirsting for God's love, experienced a holy rivalry and jealousy; she wished to emulate the Jesuits' ardent zeal for souls; like them to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and to make her life like theirs a realization of that glorious motto of St. Ignatius: "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam". The apparent impossibility of attaining to this, the sole object of her ambition, caused her real suffering. "On the Feast of Corpus Christi," it is she herself who speaks, "I was occupied with these thoughts during the procession, and glancing at the crucifix I felt my soul thrilling with a sweet and tender glow of love while these words were addressed to me: 'Behold the first Jesuit and the Master of them all'." At first this expression, "the first Jesuit," may seem incongruous and even incorrect, but we must remember that our Lord, in His ineffable condescension, accommodates Himself to the ideas and the images which He finds in the souls of those with whom He deigns to form intimate relations. He made use of the esteem and veneration felt by Madame d'Houet for

friends invited her to a pleasure party, she would smilingly say: "If I am to meet a saint I shall most certainly come". Her preference for the company of holy people was so well known that on her return to Bourges, after her first visit to Amiens, a lady accosted her with the question: "Well, did you meet any saints in your travels?" "Oh! yes," was her delighted reply, "this time I have found out their nest."

the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, to inspire her to attain to that perfection which she saw reflected in their lives. Yet, holy as was the example she wished to imitate, God looked upon it as an obstacle to the attainment of the high degree of perfection to which He called her. Nor is this to be wondered at. Was not the too human affection which the Apostles bore to the Sacred Humanity of our Saviour sufficient to prevent the descent of the Holy Spirit? "It is expedient for you that I go, for if I go not, the Comforter will not come."

Our Lord was inviting this chosen soul to attach herself to Him alone. He alone was to be the Leader whom she was to follow, the Model she was to imitate. The expression, "I am the first Jesuit," penetrated her inmost soul; our Lord used it as a spiritual lever to move her interior thoughts, transporting them from St. Acheul's or any other dwelling place of God's servants on earth, to the lowly house of Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph formed the Society of Jesus, and where those holy rules she so longed to follow as a guide to perfection had had their origin. So too the members of the Society of which she is the Mother ever look upon the home of Nazareth as their true "Mother-House," whence stretch devious pathways, it is true, but all illumined by the light which proceeds from that home of simplicity, humility, poverty, and charity.

The prophetic words of her confessor no doubt also pointed towards the carrying out of God's plans. "Father Sellier," she continues, "used to speak to me of what God asked in as decided a manner as if the whole thing had already been accomplished. He often told me that the Jesuits would take no part in the formation of the Society, that contrariwise it would enter into God's

views, that they should positively persecute me. 'And I myself,' he added, 'even I shall turn against you.' 'But Father,' I replied on one occasion, 'that will not be possible; you will only feign to do so.' 'No,' he replied, 'I shall really be against you. God will change my heart, and permit me to see things from a different point of view.' In my astonishment I replied: 'But Father, are you absolutely sure that all this will happen?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'I am absolutely certain.' 'Do you know when the work will begin?' 'Yes, I know that too,' he continued. 'Bear this date in mind; the year will not have run its course before your work will have begun. When you find the Jesuits beginning to offer violent opposition, do not falter; rather let their rejection of you rouse your courage and faith, and make you hail with confidence the hour of the coming of God's greatest graces upon you.' On another occasion, I told him that unless Father Varin approved, I would never begin the work. He replied: 'Quite right; therefore God will make use of him to begin it. But remember what I tell you, he will scarcely have taken the initiative, when he will forsake you.'

"I left for Paris about the middle of July and at once called on Father Varin. He listened to me with the greatest attention, but ended by laughing, and saying that the whole thing was beyond his comprehension. However, he made me remain in Paris, and we often had conversations together. He had requested Madame Euphrasie, Mother-Superior of the Convent of Les Oiseaux, where I had apartments, to submit me to humiliations and to send me every day into her novitiate.[1]

[1] Les Oiseaux is a well-known Convent of Canonesses of St. Augustine in Paris, and is the chief house of the congregation founded

"Father Varin said very justly that he was perfectly conscious of what I was capable, meaning by this of how much evil. He used tauntingly to say: 'you are alway ready to bargain with God'. I often said to him: 'Father, don't give yourself any more trouble about the matter; you know me well enough to believe that I am perfectly sincere when I repeat that I will undertake nothing without your approval. Your disapproval will strengthen my resistance.' Whenever he used to scold me, or to tell me that it was from my fancy or from the devil that my ideas came, I invariably replied that if he wished I would never mention them again. But this holy man whose only anxiety was to unravel that which came from God from that which might only have originated in my own imagination, returned continually to the subject. A week before the Feast of St. Ignatius he advised me to begin a novena in honour of the Saint for the intention which I had at heart. On the

by St. Peter Fourier. Madame Euphrasie obliged Madame d'Houet to submit to divers practices of humility and public mortification in the presence of other secular persons also dwelling in the convent. She complied humbly and sweetly, but fearing that her family might come to hear of this publicity and that disagreeable consequences might follow, she consulted Father Varin. He replied: "I do not at all approve of Madame Euphrasie's dealing thus with you; kindly tell her so from me!" Madame d'Houet gave her message. "You astonish me very much," was Madame Euphrasie's reply, "for I have done absolutely nothing but in obedience to Father Varin's orders and against my own better judgment." Father Varin subjected the servant of God to another trial, which we find alleged in the notices drawn up in connexion with her beatification (Article 31). He reprimanded her continually and severely; he was never satisfied with anything she did, and declared all her prayers, meditations, exercises of piety, in fact her whole spiritual life to be full of imperfections and defects. However, these trials pale before others which she had to bear at this period of her life.

day of the Feast I went to Benediction at the Jesuits' Church and afterwards venerated the Saint's relic. On leaving the church, I was accosted by a lady whom I had met once before at the door of a certain convent. She wished me good-day, and clasping my hand in hers, said very sweetly and emphatically : ' Be full of hope and courage, Madame, all the intentions for which you have prayed in this novena have been granted and will soon come to pass '. After these words she disappeared quickly in the crowd. For several days after I watched every one who entered the church hoping to meet her again. At length I saw her go into a confessional, and when the Father who had heard her confession went into the sacristy, I followed him and asked him for her address. He was annoyed, as he supposed my confessor had spoken to me of her, but candidly owned that this very remark of his pointed to the fact of there being something extraordinary about his penitent. Finally, he gave me her address, and told me at the same time what to say in order to gain admission to her. She received me as an old friend and alluded with much sympathy to the subject of our first meeting at the church door. She then told me that God had inspired her for the last thirty years to pray for the work for which he destined me to be the instrument, and that she felt sure the hour was near at hand for its realization. She spoke of my mission with the same gladness and hope as Father Sellier did, only it seemed to me with more confidence that it was God's Will."

After about a month's stay in Paris the holidays once more recalled Madame d'Houet to Berry. To grasp more fully the significance of some of the events of these holidays, we must retrace our steps. Soon after Eugène de Bonnault had been admitted to the

College of St. Acheul, he and several of his companions had an attack of measles. His mother, whose anxious love could trust to no one else the task of nursing him, obtained permission from the rector to attend him. The boy was very ill and the alarmed mother spent days and nights by his bedside, while, at the same time, she cared for the other occupants of the infirmary with such affectionateness that they too looked upon her as a mother.

A little later (June 1817) one of the occupants of the sick-ward, in which she had played the part of mother and ministering angel, became a special object of her interest and affection. Ferdinand Jeantier, Eugène de Bonnault's senior by four years, was the favourite protégé of Father Varin, who had introduced him to Madame d'Houet as such on Eugène de Bonnault's first arrival at College, and had entrusted the little boy fresh from his mother's home to the guardianship of the senior student. Ferdinand at this date was attacked by a serious illness which in a short time became so grave that the doctors held out little hopes of his recovery. In a few days they declared the end to be at hand, and he received the last Sacraments. Madame d'Houet, who was the confidant of the youth's secret desires, had an inspiration which she communicated to his confessor. "The doctor says there is no hope," she said, "but could he not be advised to make a vow to enter the Society of Jesus if God restores him to health?" The Father approved of the idea and suggested it to the dying youth, who gladly and willingly consented. The very next day he was out of danger. The doctor was thunder-struck and said to all whom he met, on leaving the sick boy's side, "He is cured; it is a miracle". Madame d'Houet

cared for him during his convalescence with motherly affection, and when the holidays came obtained permission to take him to her country-house to complete his recovery.

In the rural solitude of Parassy, so full of holy memories, Madame d'Houet and the boys led a life which, without precluding innocent pleasures, was as regular in its ways and methods as that of a religious house. Morning and night prayers said in common, meditation, Holy Mass, frequent Communion—daily, as far as possible, in Madame d'Houet's own case—the recital of the Rosary and spiritual reading; such were the exercises which sanctified their days, the servants also taking part in them. A cross had been in days gone by erected at the extremity of a plantation of hornbeams on the outskirts of the village of Parassy. Father Varin, noticing how old and weather-beaten it was, suggested the replacing of it by a new one. Madame d'Houet complied; but had the old cross repaired and erected in a pleasant and retired spot within her own grounds whither she made daily pilgrimages.

Towards the end of the holidays Madame d'Houet returned to Bourges, and while there her son and Ferdinand Jeantier again fell ill. It so happened that the servant who was mainly responsible for the housework, was likewise bed-ridden from the effects of a fall, so that Madame d'Houet was obliged to undertake the care of the three invalids. She was indefatigable in her active and devoted affection, and ministered to their every want with a cheerfulness which concealed both fatigue and any repugnance which she may naturally have felt in rendering unpleasant and trying services. Her only relaxation was that taken by the bedside of one or other of the patients while she partook of her

frugal meal of bread and fruit. When the two boys were convalescent, she took them with her to Paris. In her journeys none of her religious exercises were set aside; with that picture of the Sacred Heart, which, as we have related, was so miraculously preserved from the flames, before her, she constantly betook herself to prayer and was always soon lost in colloquies with God. At Paris, as usual, she resided at the Convent of Les Oiseaux, where, doubtless, through the mediation of Father Varin, she obtained permission to have the two boys with her. "After the holidays I returned to Paris," she relates, "and Father Varin began to harass and confuse me anew. One day after thoroughly examining all that I had told him, he wound up by saying most emphatically: 'You must positively think no more about it. Dismiss the whole thing from your mind.' I taxed him with having said the same thing many times before, and that nevertheless he was always the first to return to the subject at the very next opportunity. He assured me most decidedly, that, for the future, I need have no fear, for he would never again mention the matter. I asked him to give me his word of honour. He did so, and I, on my part, assured him that whatever I might hear in the future, I would treat as a delusion, and not speak of it to him again. On returning to the convent I entered the chapel and without any reason I knew of, burst into a flood of tears. I wept during the space of an hour. It seemed to me a most incongruous act, as I was really experiencing great joy and relief of mind at the thought that my preoccupations and uncertainties were at last at an end. I promised our Lord not to think any more of what had taken place, and I besought Him to give me the necessary strength to be faithful to my resolution.

"Next morning, at Holy Mass, I again renewed my

resolution. I was most emphatic in my determination: 'If I am to die for it, never again will I mention the subject to Father Varin'. Suddenly I heard an interior voice pronouncing most distinctly these words: 'That will do. You have done your part; but it will be he who will revert to the subject, and that before the day is over.' I cannot give an idea how these words appalled and perplexed me, and I was only able to calm myself by reflecting that it was most unlikely I should see Father Varin that day. Indeed, had I been able to leave Les Oiseaux and hide myself I would have done so. It appeared to me, that once I could, as it were, give the lie to these mysterious communications I should be less impressed and controlled by them. Unfortunately there was no chance of escape, as Madame Euphrasie had allowed me to have Eugène and Ferdinand in the convent, on the condition that I never went out without taking them with me, and Eugène was unwell at the time. Throughout the whole day I was in a most disturbed state of mind, though I gleaned some comfort from the thought that Father Varin seldom visited the convent. Moreover, I knew him to be much occupied on that particular day. I was beginning to feel less uncomfortable, when, at five o'clock, they came to tell us that Father Varin had come to give Benediction. I was tempted to go out of the house, whatever might be the consequences, and I really do not know what prevented me from yielding to the impulse. I made up my mind, that directly Benediction was over, I would hasten to my apartments and that, perhaps, if he did not see me, he would not think of asking for me. Still in case of my plan failing I impressed upon the two children that, if Father Varin happened to come in, they were to remain in the room all the time.

"All at once Father Varin was announced. He sat down and said: 'Send those boys away'. 'I cannot do so, Father,' I replied. 'They are obliged to remain in my room.' 'Send them at once into the anteroom,' he repeated. My annoyance was extreme, but I was determined to force him to keep his word. He began by saying: 'Let us talk over your business'. I replied, 'Father, I have no business'. He attempted to continue, but I interrupted: 'You gave me your word of honour yesterday, and I gave you mine that we should never mention the matter again, and nothing will make me break my resolution'. He replied, without heeding my interruption: 'Father Foloppe, who is a saint, is here.[1] I absolutely wish you to allow me to lay your case before him.' 'No, no, Father,' I exclaimed, 'I do not wish it.' Then he rose, and with

[1] Marc Folloppe was born at Gourney-en-Bray in Normandy, on April 25, 1763. He became a secular priest, but had to leave France, as he condemned the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy" as contrary to faith. Some years later he went to Russia, in which country, with the sanction of Pius VII, at the special request of the Czarina Catherine II and the Czar Paul II, a few Jesuits under their General Brzozowski were allowed to live together. Father Folloppe joined them. Some years later, when the Society of Jesus was re-organized in France under Father Clorivières, he named Father Folloppe as rector of the most important house of the province, Saint Acheul. It was while in this post that he became acquainted with Madame d'Houet. The author of his life, Père Gagarin, remarks that in giving her the rules and constitutions of the Society of Jesus, Father Folloppe in no way infringed on his rules; he only used the liberty which his post as rector gave him: "En agissant ainsi, le Père Folloppe ne manquait nullement à la règle; le pieux recteur de Saint Acheul ne faisait qu'user des pouvoirs que lui donnait sa charge" ("Vie du R. P. Folloppe," p. 74).

Father Folloppe died at Laval on 28 May, 1822, a victim of charity and mortification which he practised to an heroic degree.

that tone of authority and sanctity so peculiarly his own, replied, 'What, Madame, you do not wish it!' I burst into tears and said: 'Do as you please, but surely there seems no chance for me'. He tried to soothe me, but it was in vain. I was now sure that my imagination had no part in all that had occurred. It must then be the spirit of evil, as he himself had more than once said, a thought which threw me into despair, for I felt I was ruled by a power which completely controlled me and made me do, in an instant, things utterly distasteful to my nature.

"It had happened on a previous occasion, when Father Varin was endeavouring to convince me that I was the dupe of error, that I replied: 'Father, I am troubled beyond measure, for I have used every possible means of resisting this unseen influence; it would seem if such power be given to the enemy of our souls that it is impossible to withstand him'. Next day, when I went to Confession, he bade me set aside my fears, for the spirit of God was guiding me, not the spirit of evil.

"Shortly afterwards, as I was in the street, the thought of what God was asking of me pursued me with a persistence which no words can express. I felt as if a person were dogging my steps. I suddenly stood still saying to myself: 'This is unbearable'. Then came the thought: 'Here is an excellent proof that I am not guided by the spirit of God. Father Varin says that the visitations of grace are attended with sweetness and bring perfect peace.' I had no sooner given way to this thought than my soul, which up to that very instant had been indescribably troubled and weary, suddenly became inundated with an unspeakable feeling of happiness, and perfect rest and peace succeeded. In

the fullness of my joy and relief I cried out: 'My God have mercy on me'.

"When these emotions had given place to a normal condition of soul, I tried to persuade myself that Father Varin was right, and that anything extraordinary was delusive; but I candidly confess that at the time I was under these mysterious influences, it was impossible to think them illusions. So true is it that God is absolutely our Master, and that He governs with Divine authority the powers of the soul and thus forces us to obey Him. Through the shadows of uncertainty He makes Himself recognized, and, as erstwhile with the Apostles on the lake, we too cry out: 'Dominus est'—'It is the Lord'."

Having either conducted or sent the two boys back to college, Madame d'Houet prolonged her stay in Paris, in obedience to Father Varin's wish, until the end of December, 1817.

ST. ALOYSIUS' CONVENT, CLARENDON SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.

West Wing, a portion of which existed in 1830, when school was handed over to Madame de Bonnault d'Houet by Father Nérinckx [*See p.* 163]

ST. ALOYSIUS' CONVENT, CLARENDON SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.

School Buildings in 1913

CHAPTER IV.

VOW OF CHASTITY. RETREAT. IMPORTANT DECISION. SERIOUS ILLNESS. FOUNDATION OF THE FIRST CONVENT OF THE SOCIETY AT AMIENS.

1817-1819.

The year 1817 was a memorable one in the life of Madame d'Houet. During its course God had bestowed upon her special interior lights pointing to the work which He wished her to undertake. His designs were gradually revealed to her, sometimes with gentle force and sweetness, at other times with power and authority. But in the intervals of these supernatural communications, which were of their very nature transitory, her soul was often plunged into anxiety and doubt. There was more than one reason for this. Notwithstanding the natural strength and energy of her character, there was a certain timidity in its background, recognized by those who knew her best, and to be detected in her writings. She feared in her spiritual life anything which bordered on mysticism or which diverged from the ordinary beaten track, realizing how often souls have become dupes of their own imaginations. Again, the timidity of her nature recoiled instinctively from the life of sacrifice and of crosses which she perceived lay before her. Simultaneously with this distress of mind and with the disinclination she felt for the lot in store for her, she had to endure the very tangible trials to which Father Varin

subjected her. Everything contributed to keep her in a state of fear and anxiety. Yet the hour was now at hand when the Divine Master would establish in the soul of His handmaid the reign of perfect peace. Henceforward, contradictions might come—as indeed they did in no stinted measure—her nature might rebel, but there would, deep in the inner sanctuary of her soul, be a secret assurance that the designs of God would be accomplished in His own good time. She never, as we shall see, took a step without the command of him whom God had given her as a guide. But before reaching the shores of the promised land she had wearily to wander over the arid desert and to tarry long in its pathless wastes.

Let us listen to her: "On December 7, 1817, the Eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, Father Varin advised me to make the vow of chastity. I positively refused. I told him that if God called me to become a religious I would do so willingly, but that if I remained in the world, I wished to be free from any such engagement. The good Father urged me forcibly, using every persuasion possible, but I was inexorable; death seemed preferable to taking the vow. I went so far as to tell him, that even if I did take the vow, inasmuch as my sacrifice was a forced one, it would not find favour in God's sight. He then spoke very decidedly and told me, as indeed he had every reason to do, that I was not worthy to make the vow, but nevertheless that my doing so was God's will, and that if I did not correspond to this grace, He would abandon me to my own devices, and only ordinary graces insufficient for my eternal salvation would be my portion for the future. As I continued obstinate he withdrew the permission to make the vow he had given

me, and then left me. My repugnance to this vow must have indeed been very strong, for at the words 'I withdraw my permission,' I experienced an intense feeling of relief. But what is still more extraordinary, I had already made the same vow conditionally, and promised to renew it solemnly, as soon as Father Varin should give me leave.

"From the Jesuit Fathers' house I went to the Church of St. Geneviève and remained there for a considerable time. God alone could change my heart and conquer my aversion. In His infinite goodness He deigned to do so, and to accept an offering which no mortal man in a similar case would have accepted. I returned to Father Varin, but for good reasons he would not allow me to make my vow on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and put off my taking it to the next day. He had then the kindness to say Mass for me, and after receiving Holy Communion I took the vow as he permitted me to do. In a moment all my distress and fears vanished for ever, and that day, the happiest of my life, is ever to me a sacred, a sweet, and a most consoling memory, and throughout eternity it will be a motive for me of never-failing gratitude to my Heavenly Spouse.

"Some days afterwards, Father Varin wished me to make a retreat. I went to him every two days to give an account of my soul, but he always seemed dissatisfied with me.

"During the retreat I experienced great spiritual aridity and darkness, and felt no better than a beast of burden in the presence of our Lord. I could only cry out in my desolation of spirit, 'Have mercy upon me'. When the retreat was over, I saw the devil under the form of a bull about to spring upon me. I only had

time to make this hurried prayer: 'My God, have pity on me,' but the evil spirit fled at once. On the last day of the retreat after I had made a manifestation of my soul to Father Varin, he simply said: 'I do not think anyone could have derived less fruit from a retreat,' and told me to come back next day. On that occasion I had to wait for him in the church for three hours. At last he sent for me, and after questioning me anew and speaking at some length, he finished by saying: 'Very well, for the first time we are both of the same opinion; it is perfectly obvious that what you have experienced is not from God and is not even common sense. You must give up your projects for good and forget all about them. Set out at once for Amiens, and let neither of us again allude to the matter.'

"I thanked him sincerely, but as he conducted me to the street door, he said: 'I am coming to say Mass at your convent to-night. It was Christmas Eve. I intend to come early in order to have a further conversation with you.' These last words of his upset me once more. However, he came late and was unable to speak to me, at which I was immensely relieved, for these interviews served only to disturb and perplex me. He preached before Mass, taking as his text: 'Rejoice all you who hear me, for I come to bring tidings of great joy'. At these words I said to myself, 'Let every one else rejoice, I certainly cannot'. At that moment I felt an extraordinary change come over me. I neither heard nor saw anything unusual, but the three Masses which followed appeared to me to last no longer than a quarter of an hour. My soul was inundated with a feeling of unsurpassed peace such as I can never describe. My will was entirely changed and changed for ever. From that day, to quote Father Varin's own words, 'I ceased

to bargain with God,' nor did I again waver or hesitate in my determination to carry out God's will. I felt perfectly resigned to everything, and yet entirely unbiassed by emotion or excitement. I am conscious that these feeble words paint but in faint colours the complete transformation that had taken place in my soul. Two days later I called on Father Varin, and he too no longer hesitated. He said: 'Now I am really of opinion that God does want something from you. Go to Amiens and talk matters over with Fathers Sellier and Foloppe. They will write to me and we can then decide how you had better begin.' I returned to Amiens, and when I had told these holy priests everything, they prayed themselves and had prayers said for my intention. They wrote a little later to Father Varin, whose reply was to the following effect: 'We are at present all of one mind. It is clear that God wants something of Madame d'Houet, I think it will be wiser to begin in a quiet way. Let her rent a small house. I know a young person willing to join her.'

"Father Sellier and Father Foloppe brought me this letter which surprised me exceedingly. I told them that it seemed beyond the range of possibility that God should choose me for so great a work. The two Fathers tried to convince me that such was in truth the will of God. I replied: 'If this be true, God will have to lead me by the hand, or rather He will have to do the work Himself'. Father Sellier raised his eyes to Heaven and remained absorbed in prayer for some moments. He then lowered them, and turning to me said: 'Yes, He will do it Himself, but not in the way you think; it is by crosses, desertion, and humiliations that He will carry out His will. Do you accept the means He will make use of to carry out His plan?" I was overcome

for an instant, but after a short pause replied: 'Yes, Father, I accept whatever God may please to choose for me'. Then he said: 'Since you accept the conditions, the matter is settled, and the work will be carried out as I have told you'.

"We began at once to look for a house; but some days after I fell ill, and in a short time was considered to be in serious danger. Father Sellier was sent for. I saw that he considered my case very grave, for he at once called in the doctor. When the latter arrived I heard him say to Father Sellier: 'You have called me too late; she is beyond medical aid'. The following day I was worse, and the doctor declared that I should not live to see another day. I overheard him say this to the nursing Sisters who were attending me. Father Sellier gave me the last Sacraments, prepared me for death, and told me what prayers to say when the last moment arrived. He then said: 'I may tell you frankly, I think that you will recover. You know that God has other designs and they must be accomplished.' I believe I was at the time as near death as it is possible to be without actually dying. At midnight, contrary to all expectation, I rallied, and the next day the doctor gave every hope of my recovery.

"My convalescence was slow and tedious, and I was forced, on account of the severity of the weather, to remain indoors for many weeks. Father Foloppe often paid me long visits. He used to speak of God, of my personal sanctification, and of that which God demanded of me for the salvation of souls.

"One day in particular he brought me a copy of the Rules and the Summary of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, and said to me: 'I feel so perfectly sure that our Lord wishes you to embrace these Rules

that I am compelled to give them to you. Copy them all, but do not mention the matter to anyone. When the proper time comes you will have them at hand.'

"As soon as I was well enough to go out I began to look for a house, but found it impossible to secure even the smallest room. This was strange, but as I was in the meantime called to Paris on business, the Fathers decided that I should let the matter rest until my return.

"I stayed two months in Paris, where Father Varin subjected me to very severe trials. They were all the harder to bear, for from that Christmas Day of which I have spoken, I felt I was called on to fulfil a mission. Before I returned to Amiens he again told me that possibly God did not ask this work of me, and that he wished me to remain passive until I heard from him to the contrary. I acquiesced willingly, and I should have been only too happy if matters had ended there, but Father Sellier's prediction preoccupied me. He had said so very emphatically: 'This year will not close before the work is begun'. It seemed to me that if I could only falsify this prediction, I need no longer trouble myself about the matter. At last only six days remained of the old year. Before I went to confession I made a resolution that if happily Father Sellier said nothing, I would return to my room and not quit it until the time he had fixed had passed. He heard my confession without any unusual comment. I hastened home in great joy, and walking with a friend I chanced to meet we talked of indifferent subjects, but in parting from me she said: 'Do you remember the house which you were so anxious to purchase? It is now for sale. They were asking 40,000 francs, but are now offering it for half that price.' These words fell like a thunderbolt

on my ears. I felt that I ought to tell Father Sellier at once and did so that very day. He remarked that perhaps this was the reason why I had been unsuccessful in renting any other house, and advised me to go over the place immediately, and then put the matter in the hands of a surveyor whom he named. I did so, and a few days afterwards wrote to Father Varin. The transaction was settled so promptly that within three days I was in possession of the house and furniture for the modest sum of 16,000 francs. Before completing the purchase I asked Father Sellier to visit the house. When he had gone through every room he stopped on the staircase which led to the garden, and raising his eyes to Heaven, after a short pause, said: 'There is a great air of sanctity about this house. Buy it at once, you must begin here.'" [1]

The following is Father Varin's reply to Madame d'Houet's letter:—

10 *July*, 1818.

My dear Daughter,

It is thus that I am to address you in future, for however unworthy I be, it is part of God's plan that I should direct you and be your guide. I am answering you without delay, but how is it that your letter dated July 6 only reached me yesterday, the 9th? Are you not a little to blame, perhaps? I do not hesitate to say, that you must buy the house at once if you consider it a good bargain. When you have made the purchase, we must ask our Lord to intimate His holy will, since the house belongs to Him, and at the same time to let us know what He desires of His little handmaid who belongs entirely to Him.

I send affectionate greetings to Eugène and Ferdinand. I am

[1] It is this house, No. 17 Rue des Augustins, which the Faithful Companions of Jesus occupied in Amiens. It is still in their possession, and the modest chamber occupied by Madame d'Houet has been preserved intact, though the whole house has in recent years been improved and much altered.

glad to think that they will enjoy their holidays, and partake together of the delicious grapes of Parassy.

Farewell, my dear daughter.

Devote yourself entirely to the love of the Sacred Heart.

Yours devotedly in J. C.

VARIN.

"As my son's holidays had begun I was obliged to return to Berry, so that my family might not hear of what I was undertaking. In particular, I wished to keep the matter from my mother and from my father-in-law, who would have opposed it strongly. The latter would have appealed to Rome, had he thought it necessary, in order to prevent my taking such a step. Strange to say they both died in ignorance of my projects, which is all the more astonishing, because when I began the work it was generally spoken of in Amiens, and our family friends from Berry used to go there from time to time.

"On my way through Paris, Father Varin advised me to confide all my plans to the Abbé Gaudin. I had never mentioned them to him because since I had placed myself under the direction of Father Varin I was unwilling to consult anyone else. Father Foloppe had confirmed me in the idea that in order to do God's will and to act in the spirit of faith, one ought not to seek counsel of many. However, I obeyed, and told Abbé Gaudin. He discountenanced the whole thing, and having told me he would exert all his influence to prevent Father Varin from allowing me to begin, started at once for Paris. I thanked him from the bottom of my heart and assured him he was rendering me a signal service, for if the mistake were on Father Varin's side and not on his, God who is all-powerful would make use of him to convince Father Varin."

The holidays this year (1818) were passed as usual partly at Parassy, where Ferdinand Jeantier was again a welcome guest. This year, however, Eugène had another of his college companions with him, whom Madame d'Houet had invited to their country house for a change. He became later the Rev. Father Mallet of the Society of Jesus. She had also other friends from Amiens to swell the house party, which was a gay and genial one and more numerous than in previous years. It was a time for holiday making, but God was not forgotten in this Christian *milieu*. The young aspirant to the Society of Jesus, the future Father Jeantier, took his initial steps in the ministry, and at the request of his hostess gave short oral meditations over which they used to talk afterwards after the fashion of a spiritual conference.

At the end of three weeks Father Varin joined the party. Madame d'Houet says in her valued manuscript: "Father Varin was at that time unwell and his superiors had allowed him, advised to do so by his doctors, to spend some time with his family, in the hope that his native air would restore him to health. On his way to Besançon he called at Bourges for Ferdinand Jeantier who happened to be spending his holidays with me. On arriving at my country house, he told me that after having sought advice and considered the matter seriously, he was of opinion that God asked nothing out of the common of me, and that I must now only think of sanctifying myself. I do not remember exactly what I felt at that moment, but I know that I exclaimed: 'My God, have mercy on me'. Father Varin then suggested that I should accompany him to Besançon and make the acquaintance of his family. I accepted gladly, not for the end he proposed, but to enjoy the privilege of

hearing him speak of God during the journey. This desire to hear people speak of God had become a sort of passion in my soul since Father Varin's sojourn with me in Berry. I intended to stay at some convent and not in his home; but he would not hear of this. When I told him that I proposed to take rooms in a convent near, he made several remarks which have escaped my memory, but which were so strong that I was compelled to yield. I could only cry out: 'Have mercy on me'. An interior voice then uttered in sweet and distinct tones, the words: 'Courage, my daughter, the time of affliction does not last for ever'. Father Varin continued speaking, but say what he would the words which I had heard filled my soul with unspeakable peace and confidence. I remained in Franche-Comté, as far as I remember, a month or six weeks. God protected me during this time, which was not without its temptations, and I kept myself united to Him. He seemed to have surrounded my heart with a triple wall of defence."

The greater part of this visit was spent at Chevroz, the country seat of Father Varin's sister. While there he made new efforts to induce Madame d'Houet to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart, but without success; for she felt distinctly that such was not the will of God. On one of the last days she spent at Chevroz, as she was walking in a shady pathway, she perceived Ferdinand Jeantier, and called him to her. When he approached he noticed that her eyes were filled with tears, though at the same time she wore a happy smile. "Is there anything the matter with you?" he said. "Have you any trouble, for you are crying." "I am jealous of your happiness," she replied. "You have vowed to enter the Society of Jesus and are about to accomplish your vow. Oh! if I only were a man, with what joy would

I take the same step. But wait a while, my name is Magdalen ; I too wish to follow in the footsteps of my patron saint who loved Jesus her Master so truly that she ministered to His wants, and followed Him even to the very foot of the cross. She and the holy women did not, like the Apostles, leave Him in the hour of His need, and throughout His public life they proved themselves His 'Faithful Companions'. Such is the name which we shall bear, I and those who will associate themselves with me to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. The foot of the cross will be our rallying point. I foresee many obstacles, trials, and humiliations, but in the Cross is all my hope." The young man thanked her for this mark of confidence, and promised at her request to pray for the success of her work. As she was passing through Dôle with Ferdinand Jeantier, Madame d'Houet visited Madame du Bouillon, and had the privilege of speaking to the saintly Father Boissard who was dying in her house. Before leaving him she begged his blessing, as a dying priest and as a Jesuit, for herself and her young travelling companion, and obtained his assurance that he would pray for them both until they too had reached their Eternal Home. "I promise you this," he said. "Until we reach Heaven," she repeated. "Yes, until you reach Heaven," was the dying man's reply ; "you may count upon me." She often recalled to mind the saintly Jesuit's promise, and in moments of trial it gave her confidence. She never missed an opportunity of asking for prayers for herself and for the Society which owns her for its mother, and which is so truly the fruit of her sufferings, prayers, and meditations at the foot of the cross.

The Rev. Father Jeantier, to whom we owe these details and those concerning the holidays of 1817 and

1818, ever remained religiously and strongly attached to her who had shown him a mother's love, and whose son he loved to call himself. He often encouraged and consoled her in the overwhelming troubles which marked the first years of the existence of her Society. With this object in view he one day related to her the following incident which he had heard from Father Leleu. A holy priest went into a religious house which was very prosperous, but, alarmed at the absence of the cross, he hastily left it, and a few minutes later the building fell to the ground. Madame d'Houet was much struck by the story which had also impressed the young Jesuit. Ever after, when she said to him; "Ah! Father, the house is indeed secure," he understood that the cross was its security.

The following is an extract from a letter which Father Jeantier wrote to her in 1852 or 1853:—

MY DEAR MOTHER,

He whom you used to call your little Ferdinand, your son, would have had much pleasure in visiting you at Geneva, just to say, "How do you do," and to ask if the house was quite secure. I have but time to tell you that I do not forget you, and that if we do not see one another again in this world, we shall be sure to meet in Heaven.

To take up again the memoirs. "I returned to Paris with Father Varin and Ferdinand Jeantier, and then came the time of the heaviest crosses which I had as yet had to bear. My trials came from Father Varin, from several others, and even from God Himself. This painful state lasted until I was finally allowed to begin the work. During this last trying period the lady to whom I have already alluded as having met me at the Jesuits' church used to encourage me with the words: 'They forbid you to think of it, and yet I assure you

that the time is at hand when your undertaking is to be begun. God has shown me a great number of persons who will come from all parts to join you.' I continued to shed tears. She said: 'Yes, weep as much as you like; you will never shed as many tears as there are souls who will be saved by means of the Society you will found'.

"Father Foloppe, who had left Amiens, also wrote to console and assure me that the time was at hand; but all this seemed to give me no comfort. I left the good Father's letter unanswered, and I told the lady that I would cease to meet her if she spoke to me in this strain. It would but have added to my perplexities if I had believed what they said in the face of Father Varin's opposition.

"One day, after I had had an interview with Father Varin at Montrouge, though I do not remember now what he had said, I know that I was distressed beyond measure and crushed and wounded in spirit. In my sorrow and despair I hired a conveyance, and told the driver to take me to Picpus.[1]

[1] In this church which belonged to a community of nuns, the Sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, there was honoured, under the title of our Lady of Peace, a small and very old statue of the Blessed Virgin, which prior to the Great Revolution had belonged to the Capuchins of St. Honorè. This statue had been preserved from time immemorial in the noble family of the Dukes of Joyeuse, and was presented to the Capuchins by the last duke of that name when he joined the Order towards the end of the seventeenth century. To prevent the possibility of its being profaned, the Very Rev. Provincial of the Order confided the statue, in 1791, to the care of Mademoiselle Papin, sister of the Grand Penitentiary of Paris, who, when she was obliged to quit Paris in 1792, left it to Madame Pauline Sophie d'Albert de Luines, a former canoness of Remiremont. When this lady died in 1806 the inheri-

"During the drive my tears fell uninterruptedly. The driver did not speak to me, but I fancy he judged from my being dressed in black that I had just lost some one very dear to me. When I reached the church I threw myself on my knees, and told our Lady that I would remain there until she had compassion upon me. I arrived at about one in the afternoon, and at seven o'clock I was still in the same posture. Several of the Sisters were anxious about me, but I was so grief-stricken that I could only answer them by signs. At last our dear Immaculate Mother consoled me by an interior light which gave me the strength and courage necessary to face my trials anew. I returned home very late and utterly worn out.

"Another time Father Varin said to me: 'I am quite convinced that God calls you to the religious state. Here is what I have decided for you. You are to enter an order which is already established and to make your noviceship there. We shall then see.' I agreed to whatever he proposed. He bade me not to worry about the house at Amiens, that he would see to the young persons whom I had received with his permission, and would sell the house. He ended by saying: 'I am going to put you into retreat, and will come every day to hear your confession'. Hardly was the retreat half over when he ordered me to leave off as he had changed his plans. He then told me to return to Amiens and to do what I liked. Father Sellier treated me even more hardly.

"I enter into these details, my dear Sisters, in order to show you that I personally was of no account in the

ors of her fortune claimed the statue, but, as they thought it too sacred to be kept in a private house, they presented it to the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, May 6, 1806.

foundation of our Society, and to make you see clearly that God in His goodness did everything Himself. In the beginning, as I have already said, a single discouraging word was sufficient to induce me to give up everything, but after that Christmas Day of which I spoke to you I was able to bear, certainly not without anguish, but still without losing heart, the most trying opposition and the heaviest crosses which it pleased our Lord to send me."

This is not the place to examine what motives can possibly have actuated Father Varin in the prolonged, and, it would seem, excessive trials to which he submitted Madame d'Houet ; but this much we can say with perfect assurance, that these trials were the means employed by God, as she herself said, to prove that her Society was born not of flesh nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but was entirely the work of a Divine Founder. The holy woman in the years that followed, found in the remembrance of these trials, comfort, light, and support in the rough, narrow, and often dimly illumined pathway in which she was called to follow her Master. By walking in the footsteps of their mother, her daughters have found, and will ever find, that sufferings and trials are their safest heritage. She has left them the cross, but who can murmur, for with them as with her, it leads to light, " Per crucem ad lucem".

It was probably at this period of trial that, ever submissive to the voice of obedience, she formulated the following resolutions : " I will make good use of every opportunity God may give me of doing good, acknowledging at the same time my own pride, my want of gentleness, and my self-will. When there is question of some good work other than the foundation of a Society, in case I am unable to consult Father Varin,

By permission of C. Paillart, Abbeville, France

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, CAROUGE, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Founded 1832. School closed by the authorities of Geneva in 1875 [*See p.* 176]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, VEYRIER-SONS-SALÈVE, HAUTE-SAVOIE, FRANCE

Founded 1877. School closed by French Government in 1903 [*See p.* 183]

I will be guided by the advice and direction of Father Sellier or of Father Druilhet."

The life of Madame d'Houet, during the year 1819, was, we may be quite sure, characterized by the carrying out of these resolutions.

However, God's hour was fast approaching, and the work to which she was called was soon to be begun.

CHAPTER V.

BEGINNING OF THE SOCIETY.

1820-1821.

"At the beginning of the year 1820," writes Madame d'Houet, "I was at Amiens. Father Druilhet gave a general retreat which I took the opportunity of following. Though I derived much spiritual help from the exercises, during all the time they lasted I was a prey to anxiety, for the old idea of founding a religious congregation kept returning, in spite of the efforts I made, and had made, to banish such thoughts from my mind. I was astonished at the persistency with which it pursued me. In my perplexity I went to Father Druilhet, whom Father Varin wished me to consult, without obliging me to make him my confessor. He insisted on my writing to Father Varin, although I assured him that I had already often spoken to him on the subject. Pressing business, however, called me to Bourges immediately, and he forbade me to return without again asking Father Varin's advice. As far as I can recollect I was unable to see the latter on my way to Bourges, but when passing through Paris on my return journey I called upon him. Mother Euphrasie, Superior of Les Oiseaux Convent, gave me a message for him, otherwise I do not think I should have dared to disturb him it being Holy Week. After replying to the questions which I was commissioned to ask, he said: 'But what

about yourself? I should like you to put in writing all your old ideas.' I answered that I had already done so at Father Druilhet's request, and that I should like to talk the matter over with him. Happening to have the paper with me, I handed it to him. He read it very carefully and then said: 'I see no reason why you should not begin without further delay'. I told him that business detained me in Paris until after Easter. 'Nevertheless,' he said, 'you can now begin in spirit at the feet of our Lord, but return to Amiens as soon as possible.' He further ordered me, on my arrival there, to inform Father Sellier and Father Druilhet of the permission be had given me, and made me promise to undertake nothing without the guidance of Father Druilhet, whom he desired me to beg in his name to direct me in the work I was about to begin. When I stood up to leave, Father Varin laughingly remarked: 'At last you are going to do your own will'. These words troubled me all the more, because I felt only the greatest natural disinclination to begin and my whole spirit recoiled from the undertaking. I went to him again next day and begged him not to allow me to begin the foundation, since he judged that in doing so I was simply carrying out my own will. He tried to reassure me, but, as I held to what he said the previous evening, at last replied: 'Well, then, I may as well confess the entire truth; I believe that God does require this work of you; in fact, I am sure of it. Indeed, in spite of all the trials I have made you endure, and of the indecision that I have so often shown, I have never for a moment doubted that God has chosen you for it.' He then asked me if I had any further hesitation and if I were satisfied at this avowal. I replied, 'Yes, Father, I will then, as you wish it, begin immediately

after my return to Amiens'. He gave me permission to write to him whenever I thought it necessary."

This happened on Holy Thursday, March 30, 1820. That same night, whilst she prayed before the Altar of Repose and recalled to mind those scenes of supreme love and supreme pain—the Cenacle and the Garden of the Agony—the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus had its lowly, humble, and hidden birth in the heart of the venerable Foundress. Truly the Society was her Benoni—"the child of her pain".

Before we pass from considering these hidden and mystical beginnings of the Society, it may be well to insert certain details necessary to introduce what follows. Madame d'Houet's writings will help us to fill up the gap in our narrative. We have already said that two young persons had for some time previously been living with her in the house she had bought at Amiens. With them she followed a rule of life, written out by herself, but approved and signed by Father Sellier. The day was divided between work and prayer. Some directions follow :—

To be very exact in the performance of our duties however trifling they may appear.

To take the greatest care of persons or things entrusted to us, since it is God Himself who gives them into our charge.

After every fault, how small soever it may have been, to humble ourselves, asking God's pardon, and throwing ourselves into the arms of His mercy.

To keep ourselves ever in His holy presence and to call upon Him frequently in our needs by holy aspirations.

To cultivate evenness of temper, and, when we have troubles, not to inflict them on those around us.

Never to give way to bad temper, nor to utter angry or disagreeable words, but on the contrary always to practise charity and show readiness to oblige.

To perform promptly and exactly what we are commanded to do.

It is probable that Madame d'Houet wrote about this time the following dedication of herself to our Lady :—

"Praised be the holy Will of God."

My good Mother,

In the presence of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of the Angels and Saints, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I, Marie Madeleine Elizabeth, renew in the fullest possible manner, the donation of myself and of my son to Jesus thy Divine Son and to thee, my good Mother, both for time and eternity. I place myself as a child in thy hands, that thou mayest do with me what thou pleasest. O my good Mother, obtain for me the grace to obey thee and to accomplish the will of God, and do not permit me to undertake anything that is opposed thereto. I place likewise under thy protection the young companions whom thou hast entrusted to me, together with all those who may join me hereafter. Grant that my defects may be no hindrance to them, and obtain for me the grace to correct myself. Is it any wonder that they who know that I am thy child, are astonished at my faultiness? My confessors demand from me humility, gentleness, charity, simplicity, and obedience. My good Mother, my attaining to these virtues depends upon thee, for I am thy child. My one wish is to be united to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to do His holy will. My Mother, O my good Mother, have pity on me.

Madame d'Houet will herself give us the details of the beginning of the house of Amiens, which took place towards the end of April, 1820.

"When I arrived at Amiens, I called on Father Druilhet and gave him Father Varin's message. He absolutely refused the task of guiding me along the painful and difficult path before me, saying : 'I pity you very much, if God calls you to it'; he drew a picture of the work well calculated to discourage me, which it would have done had God not helped me. He dwelt especially on the difficulty in guiding women, assuring me that peace and union rarely prevailed amongst them. At

the time I acquiesced in all he said, but nevertheless I can say with perfect truth, that he was mistaken. We certainly have had our crosses, but not such as he forecast.

"Next I gave Father Varin's message to Father Sellier. He was exceedingly displeased, spoke to me of my defects, ordered me to write out a summary of them for Father Varin, and finished by declaring that he would not undertake to guide me, unless Father Varin sent him word in his own handwriting that he must do so. Some days later Father Druilhet called on me. He had received a letter from Father Varin, and told me that he was now willing to help me. On reading this letter Father Sellier also withdrew his refusal. Father Varin agreed with Father Sellier as to my shortcomings; he wished me notwithstanding to set about the work since it was evidently God's will that I should do so.

"Two ladies having already joined me, I called on the Sisters of Charity and begged them to allow us to teach seven of their poor children gratuitously. These children came to us each morning and returned to the Sisters in the evening. We taught them reading, writing, and needlework, but I was obliged to engage a woman to teach them sewing. A priest, the Curé Bicheron, recommended a suitable person who lived several miles from Amiens, but for some reason made me go on foot to seek her."

To the few months of peace and tranquillity following this lowly beginning, we owe the succeeding pages written on loose sheets of paper by Madame d'Houet in which she has committed to writing, by command of her directors, the thoughts that inspired her when founding her Institute. As we shall see, some of the ideas were not destined to be fully realized, but all of them

are of interest, for they give us an insight into her soul, and unveil her humble and sincere submission to those who directed her.

"Under obedience I now put down on paper the various thoughts that have presented themselves to my mind on the subject of the establishment of our Institute, and I beg my spiritual Father to cancel the whole of them should he disapprove of them. When I reflect before God on the rule of life we ought to follow, this is what suggests itself to me about our spiritual exercises and our work. I feel, indeed I am quite certain, that meditation and examination of conscience must needs play an essential part in our lives. Then I think we ought to make daily a private visit to the Blessed Sacrament at a fixed hour, during which each one of us should be free to say what prayers she pleases. I should also like the Rosary said in public, either in chapel or while we are at work. It will, I think, conduce to the cultivation of a spirit of piety, if we sometimes sing hymns together during our occupations, and have a spiritual book read to us whilst we are employed in needlework, after which questions should be asked as to what spiritual profit we have drawn from what we have heard. Should the children be present the reading would be such as to suit them. We must rise at four o'clock in all seasons, make our own beds, and sweep our rooms, paying great attention to order and neatness. Not even the Superior should be dispensed from these rules, for they will help her to learn that the word Superior means the servant of all. I do not wish her to be waited upon by others ; nor should she allow herself to accept certain little services which the most affectionate child in her home would not think of rendering even to her own mother. Exaggerated attentions

betray, on the part of those who bestow them, either an absence of childlike, fearless affection or an unbecoming desire of notice. I think God would confer a great grace on us, if He would allow us to live on alms or to earn our own living by means of some humble work—those of us, I mean, who have made our vows. This would be a sure means of keeping up among us the spirit of humility, obedience, gentleness, and poverty, four companions whom we should love dearly and in whose company we should ever live. Should any serious faults be committed against one of these virtues I would wish reparation to be made either in public or in private. If the Superior thinks, for some wise reason, that the person guilty of the fault should not make such reparation, let her undertake it herself, or ask some courageous soul to make it for her. After the example of our dear Lord, I would like the novices to visit the sick, to comfort them, to dress their wounds, and sometimes even to assist them in their last moments and to lay them out and place them in their coffins. In fact, all should be ready to undertake everything for the greater glory of God and the good of their neighbour, preserving the greatest recollection and observing silence as far as possible while thus employed. I do not suggest that the novices should go out to beg, but nevertheless I should rejoice if God so willed. Nor would there be any reason against their so doing, if they were always accompanied by a trustworthy person, and if they went only to houses indicated beforehand. The Superior should practise obedience, humility, and gentleness in her intercourse with the Sisters fulfilling the different offices, and more particularly in her personal relations with the infirmarian and those charged with the house, food, and wardrobe of the community. On Fridays I should like

each one in her turn to spend an hour before the Blessed Sacrament and before the picture of the Sacred Heart, after the manner recommended to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque."

On another page, where the same ideas are again set forth, we read additional thoughts.

"God is inspiring me at this moment with a great love of poverty. It seems to me that poverty is the support of a community. If poverty be not practised, an establishment is not a religious house. On entering the noviceship we must consent to give up our parents, and be satisfied neither to hear their names mentioned nor to write to them or receive news of them unless the Superior, for the Glory of God, should judge that we may do so. Both for the beginning and continuance of this work it will be necessary that we should find brave women like unto the three hundred warriors of Gedeon, or at any rate subjects ready in great self-sacrifice. We must forget all things, our name, our father's home, even our very selves, and be ready to be trampled upon if the salvation of our neighbour requires it. We must go straight to God, always keeping our will united to His will, and our desires in perfect conformity to His. We must ever be one with Him who is our Model and our Guide. Should God deign to bless our work it seems to me that we shall have to take pupils as boarders, so that we may give them a solid Christian education. But they must not be taught dancing, music, or drawing, our endeavour having to be to bring them up in a simple unaffected manner, and to avoid anything opposed to this. One of us shall teach them vocal music so that they may be able to sing the praises of God. Where it may be found necessary for the pupils to learn drawing, let the teaching be confined to landscapes.

I mention music, dancing, and drawing, as these three things seem often to be made use of by the devil to ensnare the souls of young people.[1]

"It seems only reasonable and just that the religious who have the charge of the boarders or of others whom they instruct, should be supported from the fees they pay. Nevertheless, any surplus of income there may be must not be saved. I wish it to be employed in the expenses incident to the giving of retreats, especially of those given to the poor whom we should ask in return to pray for our pupils. The private retreats given in our houses yearly should be gratuitous. No remuneration must be asked, but if any be offered, it may be received as an alms. The Superior or religious in charge need not be ashamed to stretch forth her hand with humility, and to express her thanks in the name of the community for any sum offered however trifling it be. She should behave on these occasions in the simple unpretending manner proper to Christ's poor, without excessive self-abasement on the one hand, and without haughtiness or affectation on the other. To act otherwise would be contrary to humility, and, if we wish to work for the glory of God and to imitate our Lord's example, we must stifle all feelings of pride. To-day I experienced great peace of mind while thinking over the manifestations God has vouchsafed me on the subject of the foundation. If He so wills, I should esteem it a great grace, in imitation of our Lord, to unite in our lives the advantages of poverty and those of

[1] It is unnecessary to remark that the requirements of modern education obliged Madame d'Houet to modify these restrictions; but she did so only after examining the question before God, and in some of the houses, before setting aside the old conventual prejudices about dancing, she consulted the Bishop of the diocese.

wealth—I mean, to live by alms and by the work of our hands, as He did. We must seek for ourselves only the fulfilment of God's will and be zealous for the good of our neighbour. I particularly wish that no politics be discussed amongst us, and that we do not interest ourselves in matters of the sort. I disapprove even our recounting to one another the everyday news of the house, for this often leads to breaches of charity and at the best is useless. Let each Sister busy herself with her own concerns and with the correcting of her own faults. We have renounced the world ; our politics are those of Heaven ; our interests and desires should be to extend the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus Christ and His holy Mother in the souls of men. With this in view, let it be our very special aim to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady."

These writings of hers make plain the thoughts which at this time occupied the mind of Madame d'Houet, and show the spirit which she wished to see vivifying her infant Society, a spirit she hoped would ever afterwards be held to.

We now resume the chronicle of events given in her memoirs. "In September, 1820, I had to return to Berry for the holidays, and I had the sad consolation of assisting at my mother's death-bed. One of the means which the devil made use of to torment me, was the thought that I might have been useful to my mother in her last spiritual needs. She died unexpectedly. I was in the country superintending the vintage, when my father wrote to me to say that my mother earnestly wished to see me, and begged me to put off whatever I was then doing. He told me not to be over anxious, for there was no real cause of alarm. When I reached

home the priest was by her side administering the last Sacraments. I hastened to her room. Her countenance wore an indescribable expression of peace and resignation, and as I threw myself on my knees beside her, it seemed to me that the good Master whispered in my ears: 'Have I not Myself looked after those whom you love?'

"When I was able to speak with her, I was deeply impressed by her perfect resignation. Her last words to me were: 'My child, I see it now; there is but one happiness here below, and that lies in suffering for the love of God'. Her death was a double sacrifice for me, as my father, knowing nothing of my plans, had made up his mind to keep me at home. If ever I desired anything in my life it was to remain with him, to comfort him in this hour of our common sorrow, and to offer him in his declining years the loving care of a devoted daughter. The higher call I had received forbade me this consolation, and my heart was torn with grief. To add to my perplexity my father took the arrangement his mind was set upon as a foregone conclusion, and often expressed his joy at the thought of having me again in the old home.

"While I was grieving for the death of my mother and comforting my father in the first hours of his sorrow, most distressing news from Amiens reached me. Father Sellier, to whose care I had confided my companions, had all but chased them from out of their house. Upsetting all my arrangements, he had caused the trees to be cut down and the garden to be torn up in order to erect two buildings for the accommodation of some laundresses. He wanted to have the work completed before my return. When I heard this I was tempted to throw up the whole thing. In my distress and perplexity I

made up my mind to consult my former confessor, Monsieur Gaudin, who, it will be remembered, had put back my mission for two years. I asked his advice in the spirit of faith, and said that perhaps after all I had made a mistake and that it would be better to give up everything and remain with my father. He replied without hesitation that such an idea was a manifest temptation, and that I was obliged in conscience to continue what I had begun.[1]

"The breaking to my father that I could not fall in with his wishes was a terrible trial for me. He could not understand what it all meant. This was, I think, the greatest sacrifice I ever had to make. I was inconsolable when I bade him farewell. Poor man, he was thoroughly perplexed, telling me that I was acting foolishly, and hoping that I would soon return to my senses.[2]

"On my way through Paris I saw Father Varin, but he only spoke to me on unimportant matters, and for my part, not knowing how far things had gone at Amiens, I did not allude to them. When I reached our house it was to find everything in confusion. Though all but impossible, under the circumstances, for us to remain there, I had no alternative. I did not know to whom to turn, so took counsel with my young companions and we resolved to consult Father Druilhet

[1] Father Sellier wanted to set up a laundry and drying ground. Madame d'Houet had certainly allowed the washing of St. Acheul's to be done for a while at her house, but it is evident that the limits of her permission had been exceeded, and that there was an extraordinary misunderstanding on the part of Father Sellier.

[2] We shall read later on in this narrative the consoling details of the death of Monsieur de Bengy; how God gave him the comfort of having his beloved daughter by his side in his last moments, and of drawing his last breath in her arms.

in a spirit of faith, since Father Varin had appointed him my director. We all agreed that the Superior of St. Acheul's must have approved of Father Sellier's proceedings, so that the advice of any of the Fathers could only be in keeping with his views. Nevertheless, I said : 'We *must* consult him, and whatever he says I shall do. Let us always walk in the spirit of faith. If the work is from God, He will preserve it.' I called on Father Druilhet, thus placing myself at his mercy. To my surprise he said it was my bounden duty to continue what I had begun, and that I was to send for Father Sellier to request him to have my house vacated, and to pull down the building which he had erected without my permission. Further, that I was to inform him that our Sisters and children would use their garden as heretofore. He also decided that after I had spoken to Father Sellier, I was to see Father Loriquet, the Superior, and intimate to him the very same thing. If death had been placed before me, as an alternative, I would have accepted it without hesitation, but I obeyed.

"Father Sellier was incensed. He threatened to expel Eugène from Saint Acheul's ; indeed, he declared that Father Loriquet had already made up his mind to do so. This was to attack me at my most vulnerable point. I only replied that he was master, and should he so decide I had but to submit. I then interviewed Father Loriquet. He simply endorsed what Father Sellier had said. This state of things lasted for about three months. Father Druilhet used to send me to Father Sellier every week to request him to have my house vacated but the latter, after putting me off from fortnight to fortnight, ended by saying : 'It will never be given back to you, so put the idea out of your head'. One morning, when the laundresses charged

with the washing of St. Acheul's had gone to Mass, I called in four men and ordered them to take down the uprights which had been erected in the drying yard at Father Sellier's expense, but without my permission. The laundresses naturally reported my action to the Fathers, and thus added fuel to the flames. The upshot was that Father Sellier sent me a summons to appear before the Justice of the Peace. I put it in my pocket and when the day came, instead of going to court, spent an hour before the Blessed Sacrament. Then, as pressing matters called me to Bourges, I commissioned our Sisters to present my compliments to Father Sellier and inform him of my absence. At first he tried to intimidate them, but at last toned down and became more civil. I wrote to him shortly after and respectfully but firmly requested him to give up my house at once. He sent me a verbal message that the laundresses would leave, which they did within a short time.

"While things were in this delicate and awkward position, strange though it may seem, Father Sellier kept sending me comforting messages, constantly reminding me that God's work would certainly be accomplished. One day when the persecution was at its height, I said to him in my distress: 'These terrible crosses make me fear that I am not led by the Spirit of God'. He reassured me and said among other things: 'Do not trouble, God is pleased with the purity of your intentions'. When I returned to Amiens I resumed my relations with Father Sellier and with Father Druilhet. The latter informed me that he could only undertake to hear my confession. He added: 'I would willingly direct you, but God has distinctly forbidden me to do so'."

The end of these trials leads us to the early days of

1821. And we may here interrupt the exterior history, if we may so call it, of Madame d'Houet, to transcribe a few earlier pages of her manuscript, dealing with the interior formation of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Saturday, January 3, 1820

"Father Foloppe told me that he had to-day said Mass for me. He ordered me to ask God earnestly to let me know if He wills me to begin the proposed foundation at once. In holy obedience I did so. Yesterday evening I was preoccupied with the thought of the wretchedness of the souls that day by day fall into hell. This morning again, after Holy Communion, the thought of the foundation came before me very persistently. It took this form—Are you not wanting in fidelity to God's inspiration in holding back? An interior inclination urged me on to take steps to go on with it as soon as Father Varin gave me permission. The material side of the work also suggested itself to me. Had I not better look out at once for a suitable house? The example of David who busied himself in procuring materials for the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, which he himself was not to build, continually recurred to my mind. Father Foloppe said yesterday that I must be prepared for much opposition at the outset. He quoted these words of Holy Writ: 'Unless the grain of wheat die it cannot bear fruit'. They haunted me, and I reasoned that if the grain of wheat remained in the granaries of the father of the family it could neither die nor begin to bear fruit! I felt that I ought to begin, however much such a step might be opposed by the world and by the devil."

January 6, *Feast of the Epiphany.*

"During my meditation, having placed myself in the presence of God, I drew much sweetness from the thought that our Lord Himself was to be the Founder of our Society and that He alone would be its guide. I then tried to think of the Magi, but instead of entering into their feelings of devout thanksgiving my mind reverted to the subject which was uppermost in my mind. I asked our Lord very earnestly to give us three things: His Spirit, His Heart, and His Mother. I wished, as on former occasions, to make a fourth petition, for I felt that there was still something very precious to be asked for. Several things presented themselves to my mind, and amongst them I thought of the securing St. Joseph and St. Anne as our special patrons. The idea appealed to me greatly, but I felt that there was something yet more sacred which God had in His keeping, and which, at my prayer, was to be His fourth gift. Suddenly the Holy Name of Jesus presented itself to my mind, and with a heart overflowing with spiritual delight and gratitude I begged Him to let us bear His Holy Name."

Here Madame d'Houet recalls the opposition which had been threatened against her Society's taking any such title. "These," she goes on, "are the thoughts that occurred to me. Why should they prevent us taking this Name? It is not in the footsteps of anyone here below that we wish to walk, but in those of Jesus Christ Himself. Our Divine Lord allowed women to gather round Him, and they almost alone accompanied Him to Calvary. From the cross He bequeathed to them His Holy Name, His Heart, and His Mother. Notwithstanding the love of St. John and the repentance of St. Peter, the holy women were the first at the sepulchre on Easter

morning. They too had the privilege of first beholding the risen Saviour, and they lingered in the company of the Apostles until the descent of the Holy Ghost. In imitation of these holy women we will be the Companions of Jesus. If we seek to imitate the sons of St. Ignatius, it is because they are the close imitators of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus I felt inspired to beg earnestly of God the realization of all that I had so long and so unceasingly prayed for. I called Heaven and earth to witness to the sincerity of my purpose, and reminded the Eternal Father of the words of His Divine Son that all things are granted in the name of Jesus."

January 14, *Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.*

"To-day at the Convent of the Holy Family three Masses were said for my intention in honour of the Most Holy Trinity. I cannot express the emotion I felt while God was revealing to me what He wished regarding certain particulars of my project. I understood that those called upon to bear the noble title of Faithful Companions of Jesus must cultivate great self-renouncement and self-abnegation; I realized too that the position of Superior would be no impediment to the practice of this absolute denial of self. Then the Name of Jesus was shown to me as that precious pearl which ennobles us for ever, and for the acquiring of which we must be ready to renounce all else besides. This vision filled me with ineffable sweetness. Whenever I recall the circumstance my heart becomes again all aglow with the same tender and sacred feelings. Would that I could describe all I felt, and the earnest longing that I experienced during that happy day to live and die a Companion of Jesus.

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, RUE DE FRANCE, NICE, ALPES MARITIMES

Founded 1839. School closed by French Government in 1904 [*See p.* 209]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, GUMLEY HOUSE, ISLEWORTH, LONDON, W.

Founded 1841 [*See p.* 213]

"God is inflaming my heart with a great love of holy poverty. He has also strongly excited me to devotion to the Holy Trinity and to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Five Wounds and above all his wounded Heart are my one refuge. I feel a lively devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The reading of the Gospels and of the Imitation of Jesus Christ has a wonderful effect upon me. I seem to be reading them for the first time. I would willingly consent never to read any other books. I experience a longing desire to be united for ever more with our Lord Jesus Christ, to do all my actions in union with Him and as He would have done them. God has also given me a very clear insight into my personal defects. I deplore my disagreeable temper and my continual imperfections. It is clear to me that in willing to make use of me in His service He designs to show forth the more plainly His own mercy and power. I behold myself in His hands as a poor weak instrument which He chooses to use, but which He can also in an instant cast aside as worthless. I often seem to hear those words echoing in my heart: 'A proud soul is utterly worthless. God will reject her because she seeks to rob Him of His glory.' Moments such as these are unspeakably happy ones. I feel like a person who, after having been a prey to acute bodily sufferings, all at once finds herself freed from them. When I am in this state thoughts of the justice and holiness of God present themselves forcibly to my mind. At times a slight feeling of fear comes to me, but the love of Jesus Christ and the sight of His Five Wounds, which are all my refuge, soothe and comfort me."

CHAPTER VI.

WONDERS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

1821-1822.

On account of its date, January 28, 1821, we here insert a fragment from a short letter of Father Varin's:—

> Blessed be God that He seems to prosper, even thus early, the beginnings of a work in which He wishes to make use of you for His own glory. Father Foloppe has informed me of the matter. Will you be good enough to present my respects to him?

Madame d'Houet thus relates the progress of God's work, and how His providence directed her in her struggles.

"I was longing to have a chapel in our house and the Blessed Sacrament under our roof. I therefore called on the parish priest, who was one of the Vicar-Generals of the diocese, and begged him to obtain this favour from the Bishop. Though kindly disposed towards us, he refused. He said that he liked to see our Sisters and the children at the public church, and consequently wanted them to continue frequenting it. He told me that the Bishop would not give us permission to have a chapel of our own without consulting him, and that he would never consent to it. I replied that I had asked his counsel in the spirit of faith as my adviser and that, since he disapproved, I would take no further steps but leave the matter in God's hands. On leaving him

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, La Chassotte, Fribourg, Switzerland
(Late Geneva Convent and Veyrier-sons-Salève Convent)
Founded 1903 [*See p.* 183]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Turin, Italy
(As in 1910, before Erection of recent New Wings)
Founded 1836 [*See p.* 184]

I chanced to meet a personal friend of his and informed her of what had passed between us. Her reply was significant! 'If God wants it, Monsieur le Curé will not be able to withstand Him.' She suggested making a novena and promised to join in it. On my return to the house I sent for the workmen and had a chapel erected, just as if I had already obtained the required permission. I felt I must do what lay in my power and leave the issue in God's hand. Some days later, feeling that I needed advice from Father Druilhet, and thinking that I saw him go into his confessional, I followed him. I was astonished to hear a different voice and found I was speaking to one of the Vicar-Generals. As I happened to mention children he put some questions to me, and in fine told me that the meeting was providential, for he wanted to place a young child in safe hands. He visited us next day and, surprised to find me busy preparing the chapel, asked me if I would like to have Mass said in it. I explained our position, and told him that I had promised to take no further step in the matter. 'Very well,' he said, 'but I have made no such promise.' The very day the chapel was completed this Vicar-General called with M. Cotta, his predecessor in office. He asked me how the chapel was going on. I told him it was just finished. 'I am so glad,' was his ready reply, 'for I have brought the Bishop's permission for you to have Mass there and also reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.' He informed me that the parish priest was very ill and at that very moment was being bled; but bade me in spite of this to go at once to his house and inform him that the Bishop had given the necessary permission. The housekeeper was much annoyed at my requesting to see him and inquired if I wished to assist at the operation, but

I delivered the message. When I returned home I told the priests what had occurred. They were amused. They arranged that the chapel was to be blessed the next day with a Mass immediately afterwards."

"What was now our joy and consolation in seeing our Lord take possession of this humble abode, in the midst of our poor children. The following is a copy of the document drawn up :—

On August 8, 1821, a domestic chapel was, by permission of Monseigneur Marc-Marie de Bomballes, Bishop of Amiens,[1] blessed by Jean Correur, Priest, Honorary Canon of Amiens and Vicar-General. The Bishop's authorization is dated the 3rd of the same month. This chapel is situated at the residence of Madame d'Houet in the Rue des Augustins.

The ceremony took place in the presence of the Very Reverend Canon Cotta, Grand Penitentiary of the Diocese, and of the above named lady. There were also present the poor children whom she instructs in religious doctrine and to whom she gives an elementary education.

We have signed these presents in duplicate form at Amiens, on August 9, 1821.

(Signed) CORREUR.

Two days later I heard that the parish priest was extremely annoyed at what had taken place. He particularly objected to our having Mass on Sunday, because it would make one Mass less in the church. God, however, again came to our assistance. Some time before I had rendered a trifling service to the Superior of the Lazarists, M. Hamon, and he had commended me in a very kind manner to their branch house at Amiens, while expressing regret that he could not himself make me some return for what I had done for him. I called

[1] The Bishop of Amiens at the time was Marc-Marie de Bomballes, who had been consecrated on October 14, 1819. He died at Paris on May 15, 1822.

upon the Superior and explained how we were situated. He promised us that he would send us a priest on Sundays and, when possible, on week days. The Vicar-General who had blessed our chapel advised me to give the parish priest an explanation. He received me, as can be imagined, somewhat discourteously. I told him all the steps I had taken in order that he might be fully informed of what had occurred, of which he had been kept in ignorance. He persisted that he certainly would not allow any of his priests to leave the parish church on Sundays. My telling him of the arrangements I had made with the Lazarist Fathers was very far from calming the troubled waters. He replied with manifest annoyance: 'A likely thing, indeed, that you, a stranger in the town, should know the Lazarists and that they should be indebted for anything to you!'

"Throughout these happenings, disagreeable as they were, the parish priest bore us no real ill-will, though he owned that he wanted to have our children in the public church, for he thought that their example would edify his people. I am not aware that he made any further attempt to gain his point. All that I know for certain is that when some one expressed surprise to the Bishop at his giving us the permission we wanted, his Lordship replied that he was prepared to do a great deal more for us. Of set purpose I had as yet not called upon him, for Father Varin had always impressed upon me that we were to consider ourselves as quite unworthy of notice, in fact, as mere nobodies, so that I had shrunk from anything like publicity. But His Lordship sent me word that he wished to see me on his return from Paris whither he was called. In the meantime he assured me of his friendliness and of his interest in our work."

Madame d'Houet followed so much to the letter the

counsels of Father Varin, and was so successful in making herself appear in the eyes of the public as a person of no account whatever, that both she and her work were commonly spoken of with absolute contempt. "We have here in Amiens," the people used to say, "such and such convents; as for Madame d'Houet's house that does not count." Strange reports too were spread about concerning her name and family. She was aware of the mistakes propagated, but instead of rectifying them she took delight in suffering humiliation under every shape and form. When questioned on such matters she replied in so humble a manner that the misrepresentations only gained ground. It was thus that this first house of the Society, "The Cradle" as her daughters lovingly style it, began in poverty and contempt. Truly it was the mustard seed hidden in the earth, the lowly seedling that has since thrown out far-spreading branches, such that beneath them many souls seeking the shade of the cloister have found shelter.

Madame d'Houet continues :—

"The Bishop fell ill as soon as he reached Paris and died almost immediately. This loss seemed to threaten the very existence of our little house. Our parish priest, being senior Canon, was looked upon as the probable Vicar-Capitular. At the election, however, to the great astonishment of every one, his name came out only third on the list of nominees, of whom M. Dupuy, our friend, was the first. Some months later the parish priest wrote to forbid us to have Mass said in the house. I took his letter to the Vicar-Capitular. He told me that the parish priest was going beyond his rights in giving such an order, and that my best plan was to leave his letter unanswered. The children's First Communion was a further anxiety to me, for the day for it was ap-

proaching, and we were anxious to have the ceremony in our own chapel. God came to our help. The Vicar-Capitular, who knew our wishes, sent word by a Sister of Charity not to broach the subject of First Communion until the public function in the parish had taken place, and in case the parish priest asked about it to say the children were not as yet quite ready. The Jesuit Fathers too were making our position very unpleasant, and in this particular case insisted to me that the parish priest would not allow us to have the ceremony in our own chapel, and that the ecclesiastical authorities would not interfere. I called on the Vicar-Capitular, reminding him that I came to him as the representative of the Bishop, and begged him to tell me what to do. He directed me to go to the parish priest and told me what to say to him. I shrank from this step all the more as I had not replied to the letter I have mentioned. And this letter was the first thing he spoke of. I told him I thought keeping silent the more respectful manner of acting, as I held my permissions direct from the Bishop. I asked him what he thought I ought to have done. He smiled and had to admit that the position was an awkward one, adding that he presumed I had acted for the best. 'Very well,' he concluded, 'let bygones be bygones. I consent to your having Mass. I exclude but one day in the year—that of the First Communion.' My embarrassment may be imagined. I then told him that it was about this very First Communion that I had come to consult him to-day, at the suggestion of M. Dupuy. He used every persuasion, gentle and harsh, to make me change my mind. 'You can assure the Vicar that I shall never consent, but of course he is master and can do as he pleases.' With these words he went out of the room, slamming the

door after him. When I informed M. Dupuy of what had occurred, he remarked: 'Very well, we shall take him at his word. I now give you the permission he has refused.' He appointed M. Dubois to give the preparatory retreat and Father Varlet to hear the confessions. One day these two priests told me candidly that they did not believe there was any priest in the town who would dare to say Mass in our chapel on the First Communion day, and that they thought I ought to temper my zeal with a little more prudence! 'Have you any special reason for this unlimited trust in God?' they said. I told them that whenever I consulted the Vicar-General in my difficulties and showed hesitation or fear, he reproached me for my want of confidence in Divine Providence and often addressed me as 'Woman of little faith'. As a matter of fact there was really no priest on whom I could count, for the one—and there was only one inclined to help me—who had promised either to come himself or to send a substitute, withdrew on the very eve of the First Communion day. It was too late to take any steps that evening, so next morning I sent a Sister to tell the Vicar-Capitular of the straits in which we were, and to ask him to say the First Communion Mass himself. She returned to tell me that he was already half through his Mass when she reached his church. It was close upon eight o'clock, the hour fixed for the function. The children and their parents were in chapel, and there was nothing now to be done but to tell them that the priest had disappointed us. Our feelings can be better understood than expressed. The clock struck eight. 'Ah, there is the hour fixed for the Communion Mass,' we were saying to one another. But while the clock was still striking, the hall door bell rang and to my surprise a priest presented himself. He

saluted me and said, 'Is not this the house in which a First Communion is to take place this morning? I am on my way to La Trappe to make a retreat and ought to have left this morning at four, but Father Varlet wrote to say that the greatest favour I could render him was to come and say Mass here for you.' He performed the ceremony in a most impressive manner and gave the children a most beautiful and appropriate discourse. After breakfast a priest of the town came to see me. He told me that he had been disturbed all night by the thought that he ought to say Mass in our chapel and he hoped I would allow him to do so. I thanked him sincerely and said that his would be a Mass of thanksgiving since the First Communion Mass was over. I did not dare to invite him for the evening ceremony as the priest who had given the First Communion had said that he would try to come. I was anxious to conceal our trouble and embarrassment from both parents and children, so, relying again on God's providence, I fixed on four o'clock for the function. At that exact time the priest who had said the second Mass arrived without my having mentioned a word to him beforehand. He said he thought we had no one and he fancied four o'clock would be a convenient hour. I cannot say all we felt that day on which God came to our help so miraculously. Our hearts overflowed with gratitude; for we felt that Divine providence had permitted this absolute dearth of earthly succour only to prove once more that He Himself wished to do everything for his Faithful Companions. Nor was this all. It had been arranged beforehand that Father Varlet should give the children the scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel on the following Sunday, but dreading to offend the parish priest he refused at the last moment to come. I had business at

St. Acheul's on the Saturday, and finding that a priest of my acquaintance was there *en passant*, had asked to see him. When he came into the room he said that he knew what I wanted, and so sure was he of it that he had already asked permission to say Mass in our chapel the next morning. After Mass I asked him if he had faculties to confer the scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel. He said he had and would be pleased to enrol the children. Before the enrolment he, too, gave us a beautiful discourse. Thus God, in His infinite mercy and goodness, bestowed on us all that we needed and fulfilled our every wish. The way in which in the end we obtained the privilege of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament was also very extraordinary. The Vicar-Capitular, in other respects so very kind, would not grant us this privilege. He used to say that he withheld his consent in our interests, because it would look better if the new Bishop were to be the one who accorded the permission. But I continued to importune him. One day, by mistake, when he was saying Mass in our chapel, he consecrated a particle too many, and did not consume it. Having placed it in the tabernacle he desired me to tell the priest to consume it next morning. I went to M. Correur, the Vicar-General who had blessed the chapel, and explained what had taken place, telling him how grieved I was at not having the Blessed Sacrament in the house. He advised me to say nothing for three days until the Feast of St. Joseph and then to renew my petition. The Vicar was exceedingly annoyed and upbraided me in no measured terms. His blame was so severe that I did not dare make any reply. He repeated over and over again : 'I would never have thought you capable of such an act'. We were very much distressed and prayed continually that God might make him change

his mind. At last, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, I made one last earnest effort. The Vicar would not yield and ended by saying that he was grieved to find me so headstrong. I assured him that after this refusal I would make no further attempt to obtain what I wanted, and that I left the matter entirely in God's hands. Shortly afterwards a holy priest, who, I think, was the Vicar's confessor, called upon me and told me that our Lord was displeased because M. Dupuy had refused to place Him in our house, and that it was His Divine will to come there at once. 'Moreover,' he went on to say, 'I have just informed M. Dupuy of this.' I do not know what the Vicar thought, but the next morning he called. In the course of conversation he said: 'Well, when do you want me to give you the Blessed Sacrament?' Though I thought he was joking, I at once replied: 'On the day of Corpus Christi; it is such a beautiful feast'. He continued: 'No, Corpus Christi is too far off, I mean to give it to you as soon as you have a ciborium'. We then settled for the next day or the day after. The change was so sudden that I could not realise that such a happiness was to be ours, until I beheld our Lord taking possession of the lowly dwelling which we had with great love prepared for Him."

Directly Madame d'Houet had obtained the privilege of having the Blessed Sacrament under her roof, she chose, as close as possible to the King's audience chamber, a tiny room for her own cell. This cell which still exists is as comfortless, as lowly, and as poor as when she left it, for those who revere her memory have loved thus to preserve it in its original simplicity and bareness. Whilst on this subject it will not be out of place, although we anticipate the trend of events, to insert some touching words from the pen of Abbé

Martin. He is speaking of this little chamber in the first convent at Amiens, the "Cradle" of the Society. He writes: "Towards the middle of the year 1823 (we cannot quite fix the date), it often happened that Madame d'Houet used to retire for long periods of time into this hallowed chamber from which a wall alone separated her from the chapel sanctuary. Sometimes for days she would remain there so absorbed in God as scarcely to touch food. No one in the little community dared to disturb her. From time to time, however, they ventured to send to her the youngest of their number. The good Sisters knew that the approach of the child would not trouble the raptures of their saintly Superior. The gentle Julia Guillemet (for it was she) used to enter the room noiselessly and to approach her mother simply and confidingly. She looked at her, she listened, she prayed, and finally after hours of patient waiting, without receiving the least mark of recognition, she would approach nearer and kneeling beside the holy woman would beg her to take a little nourishment. Madame d'Houet did not appear to resent the intrusion of the gentle girl. It would indeed seem that in spite of her presence she in a sense felt herself still in utter solitude. At last, however, raising her bowed head she would cast an affectionate look on the kneeling form beside her, and setting aside with a quiet wave of her hand the proffered food, she would break forth from the abundance of her heart into a discourse of God and heavenly things. It was in such moments of mystical intercourse, when the saintly Foundress was aflame with the fire of Divine charity, that Julia Guillemet formed for her an affection which in the future was to be her solace and her happiness, but which, when she was separated from

her spiritual mother, became to her a constant source of sacrifice.

"Mother Julia Guillemet and the first religious of the Society always believed that during these long hours of union with God, their holy mother was raised to the heights of sublime contemplation."

CHAPTER VII.

TRIALS. FURTHER UNDERTAKINGS FOR GOD'S GLORY.

1822-1826.

"I OUGHT now to speak of the early organisation of the Society," writes the venerable Foundress. "We began with three postulants. Some time later several others joined, though Father Gentil, the ordinary confessor, did his best to prevail upon them to go elsewhere. However, I did not think it would be wise to ask for a change of confessor, for I trusted that God would make use of this good priest to separate the tare from the wheat. Perhaps I am mistaken, but I believe he was in fact the means of ridding us of subjects who would not have taken up our spirit, and who, later on, would have been difficult to deal with. The result was that at the end of two years we were fewer in number than when we began, and had made but little, if any, headway. When I had almost lost heart God gave me an unexpected comfort, for Father Varlet came to Amiens; and both he and Father Deplace began to show some interest in our little foundation. The community, if such it could be called, was now reduced to three. We had just dismissed the only one of our number who was talented and highly educated. Such advantages appeared to me to count for very little, if not coupled with a docile spirit and one in harmony with the holy rules which we had

adopted. Hardly had she left than I was attacked with a dangerous illness. My confessor obliged me to seek medical advice in Paris, where I consulted several skilled physicians. The general opinion was that my state was most critical, but that by leading a quiet life I might live for another year. I returned to Amiens feeling that I was doomed. To add to this I found Mother Louise in a most alarming state of ill-health. She told me that she felt she was dying, nor did the doctors give any hope of her recovery. I was obliged to nurse her day and night, though at the time I was myself very ill and believed my end, as the Paris doctors had declared, to be not far off. I did not know to whom I could confide my mission which I felt was from God. In my perplexity I called to my side an ingenuous child of thirteen years of age—Julia Guillemet—who was longing to join us, but whose parents would not allow her to enter. I gave her an outline of what I thought God asked, and urged her to offer herself generously to accomplish His holy will. She promised to do so. Thus, after two years of labour and painful reverses, the work of God was committed to a simple child of thirteen who had, moreover, to earn her own living.

"Soon, however, my health improved and Mother Louise also grew better. I was on my way to Paris to consult a doctor when I felt impelled to call upon a priest whom I knew slightly. I told him of the work in which I was engaged, for it seemed to me that God intended to make use of him to draw fresh subjects to the Society. Notwithstanding that I tried to put away the idea as an absurdity, the same thought recurred with persistence, especially after I reached Paris. I felt alarmed, and knelt down to promise our Lord that I

would not follow an inspiration which did not seem to come from Him. Father Varlet had given me a message to a friend of his, and attached great importance to its being delivered very accurately. This lady had changed her address, and I vainly sought her from door to door for three hours. In my dilemma some one advised me to ask for her address at the sacristy of her parish church. What was my astonishment to find there the very priest whom I was making up my mind not to consult. He was saying his office, and as I was leaving asked me to wait for an instant. He then entered into conversation with me, displaying a lively interest in our work, and having questioned me closely, told me that he could send me several subjects. He promised to see to the matter and to write me full particulars. It seemed clear that God wished me to come into touch with this good priest, for though we had not many ideas in common he sent us several valuable subjects, and they formed the nucleus of the nascent Society. The first of these postulants arrived when Mother Louise was recovering. She witnessed what took place at the first Communion, and was so impressed that she made up her mind to remain. It was about this time we decided to take poor children to live in the house at the modest rate of £6 a year. This brings us down to the end of July, 1822, and a little more than a year afterwards our numbers allowed us to think of a second foundation—that of Châteauroux. Monseigneur de Châbons, the new Bishop, had just arrived at Amiens.[1] We little realized what a true

[1] Jean Pierre Gallien, Count de Châbons, was born at Grenoble, 11 May, 1756. He became Bishop of Amiens, December 8, 1822. He resigned his See, December 21, 1837, and died at Fontainebleau, October 24, 1838.

Jean Pierre Gallien, Comte de Châbons, Bishop of Amiens
Born at Grenoble, May 11, 1756. Died at Fontainebleau, October 24, 1838

friend God had raised up to us in the person of this benevolent Bishop. He at once showed interest in our Society, interest so paternal, so sympathetic, so sincere, that I can truthfully say that he personally identified himself with every new foundation and every step in the Society's development. About the same time God sent a valuable subject—Madame Legrand (*née* Louise Demory) to recruit the ranks of the little community. Hers was an ardent nature, one in which were blended great firmness of character, prudence, and an excellent judgment." We cite *in extenso* the letter which Madame d'Houet wrote to Madame Legrand.

MADAME,

You wish to know the name of the person who drew up the rules of the house and who is charged with its direction. I am not free to inform you before you join us. His chief meed of praise is found in the rule of life compiled by him, which I had the pleasure of allowing you to read. As to this rule of life itself, its merit lies in the fact that it leads those who follow it faithfully to the practice of self-sacrifice and high virtue.

You ask, Madame, if you will be free to leave us after a certain time of probation, if you feel that God does not clearly call you to the life. Most certainly. It is only after a long period of trial that you will be allowed to take your final engagement.

And now, Madame, I place the entire matter in God's hand, and in spite of the desire I have to see you among us, I only ask the greater glory of God and the fulfilment of His adorable will. Still, I feel that I ought to tell you that the fate of a great number of children will depend upon your decision. Numbers of children in the different parishes of Amiens are to make their first Communion in a month or six weeks. Many of them have to be instructed and prepared, and I have been proposing a new branch of work which will enable us to take on fifty additional children. Yesterday, in connexion with this proposal I received a letter, couched in very positive terms:—

"The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"You cannot divide yourself into two. Wait patiently, for our

Lord will manifest His will, and will send you fresh subjects. Among them will be one who can replace you in your absence."

I tell you this for yourself and for the spiritual guide whom God has given you, and for whom I have a deep respect, seeing the submissiveness and confidence in God with which he inspires you. I will not hide from you that we should not lack subjects were we to accept all who present themselves for admission. But what we need are the three hundred warriors of Gideon—truly generous souls who know how to renounce themselves, and to place not only the glory, but the *greater* glory of God, above self and self-love.

I would suggest, Madame, if you decide on joining us, that you mention the matter to no one except to your director. This will obviate unpleasantnesses should your step not prove final. Your spending ten days or a fortnight here will appear to the outer world as if you were making a retreat. Meanwhile, you will have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the rules and regulations of the house, and God's will is sure to declare itself. In the event of your not being called to the religious life, you will return to Noyon without giving cause for comment. Even should it come to light that you have been staying in this house, it is well known that persons come here to make retreats. This is the plan we follow out with all our postulants. I find the doing so best for them and for ourselves too. For the last fortnight we have been holding catechism classes for adults. Many factory girls expressed a wish to come in the evening for religious instruction. There are about fifty-five of them attending regularly, and all seem pleased. We have the satisfaction of feeling that, even if we are not doing them much lasting good, we are at least for the time being keeping them from a great deal of actual harm.

Farewell, dear Madame. I have, I fear, detained you too long, etc.[1]

Written three months after the date of this letter, we now come upon one from Father Varin, perhaps the last that he addressed to Madame d'Houet.

[1] Madame Legrand was a great help to Madame d'Houet at the foundations of Châteauroux, Nantes, and Sainte-Anne-d'Auray. She accompanied her to Rome on the occasion of her first visit in 1826, and died a holy death at Nantes in 1836.

Paris, 24 *February*, 1823.

Madame and dear daughter in Jesus Christ,

Your little house is well filled, I feel sure, for I know that when there is question of saving souls, you give shelter to as many as possible. However, do you think that by some means you could make room for a child of ten? She is a tender lamb snatched from the clutches of the wolf. Beneath your roof and under the protection of your wing she will be safe from danger. Her keep and clothing will not be at your expense. Send the accounts here.

Kindly let me have your immediate reply. You will be pleased with the child.

Pray for your devoted servant in Christ,
Varin, *Priest.*

The following is Madame d'Houet's reply. From it we learn some interesting details of the early works of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Dear Reverend Father,

This little house belongs to our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin, and to you. You have only to command and you will, I hope, find us grateful and obedient daughters, only too happy and ready to meet your wishes. By all means send us the little girl whenever you like. I feel certain that you are satisfied as regards her moral conduct. We are particular, most particular on this point. You alarmed me somewhat by mentioning the wolf, but you would not place one such amongst our lambs. I know you will pardon my making this remark, but it would be impossible for me to have it on my mind and not to mention it. Our Lord continues to shower His blessings on this little house even more abundantly than since I last wrote to you. I tell you, but under the seal of confession, dear Reverend Father, that notwithstanding the extent of the promises made to me, I could never have believed that God would have shown such abundant mercy to me. But again, what shall I say of myself? Ah, what a terrible account I shall have to render to God! In the midst of so many graces, amongst persons who are truly saints, whose example fills me with confusion, I continue the same as ever, and I do not seem to make efforts to change. God who cannot but be displeased with me, contents Himself with warning me incessantly. One would say that, wearied out with my resistance to grace,

He withdraws direct communication and leaves me more or less to myself. I am, as it were, in a passive condition before Him. All this is really truer than my poor words can convey. I often say to myself: "What will become of me? Where should I go were I to die?" Father, pray very earnestly for me, I entreat you.

We are now fourteen in number, and three others are coming in a few days. Some of the postulants are rich, but we required them to give up all before they joined us, and to find their riches in the poverty of Jesus Christ. We were obliged to place the children, who are engaged in picking cotton, in a separate house with two mistresses. Father Druilhet and Monsieur Dupuy advised this. They both think we ought not to give up this work, as there is so much good to be done amongst that class. A kind lady has lent us her house until Easter, and in the meantime I am looking out for another. You know, I think, that we employ only good, innocent children for the cotton picking. We take them to prevent their going elsewhere. There are about two hundred and fifty. Another work of which I have already spoken to you is the evening class we hold for girls employed in factories and for others in dangerous surroundings. About eighty of them come to us every evening from seven to nine to be instructed in their religion, and to learn their catechism. With them come elderly women, married and unmarried; many have forgotten their prayers and have not made their first Communion. I have induced them to pass their Sunday evenings with us, and I often spend my time of prayer in playing "Fox and Geese" with them. They have promised to spend their Sunday afternoons here, if I can give them a yard or out-door place of recreation. To meet this want I shall have to rent another house with a yard or garden, and divide it between the innocent children, the cotton pickers, and these poor adults who require supervision and must not have any communication with the children. There is no accommodation for them in our present house, where we have already placed seventy children who are in training to be servants. These children are superior in every respect to those engaged in picking cotton, who are usually drawn from a very low class of the population. Had I not made separate departments we should have lost the children of better condition.

But, dear Reverend Father, how different your letter is from those you used to write. Not one word about God, not one word of advice which of old you never omitted to give me even in the

shortest of your notes. The very conclusion is altered. Please do not send your letters through a third party. We shall willingly pay the postage.

Let us pause for a short space, and gaze on a picture of the life led by Madame d'Houet and her first companions at Amiens, the "Cradle" of the new Society. Mother Euphrasie Delaporte thus writes:—[1]

"The saintly Foundress and her companions were exact in keeping their rules and were devoted to the poor children under their charge. They had renounced earthly pleasures, but were happy and joyous in their daily life of sacrifice which was such as to gladden the heart of their Heavenly Spouse and to merit eternal reward. Their holy Superior was the life and soul of the fervent community, and her example softened the many hardships they had to endure. The food during these years was very simple and very frugal, and oftentimes distasteful. If we except the chapel which was adorned with their best, and the parlour where neatness and order had to make up for shabby furniture and poor appointments, the house lacked even necessaries. Everything, so these first nuns used to say in later days, was unpleasant if measured by the world's standards. Indeed, it was often remarked that the more trouble they took to polish and arrange their modest belongings, the meaner and more unsightly they appeared. The same remark held good for the food, for the more pains they took to make it palatable, the less appetizing it turned out. Again, when the children whom they had charge of came to the house they were usually not only in a neglected condition but positively dirty. As a consequence, the services which

[1] Mother Euphrasie Delaporte entered the Society in 1824, and died in Paris, June 28, 1863.

the good Sisters had to render to them were trying and unpleasant. It sometimes happened that a new-comer communicated a disagreeable malady to her companions. But to witness the bright, joyous manner in which these first Faithful Companions of Jesus nursed all, would have made onlookers suppose that they themselves had been born in the humblest homes and accustomed from infancy to rough, hard work. Coarse food, comfortless and cold rooms, anything did to supply the needs of this high-born lady and her companions. True, no doubt it was that, though she never had a thought for herself, she was ever on the alert to sweeten the discomforts of her religious daughters; but sometimes this was not possible. When this happened she would say in gentle, affectionate tones: 'You are deprived of such and such things, my Sisters, but God keeps an account of every privation borne for love of Him'. At the recreation hour she displayed the amiability of a naturally bright character, and drew from her many-sided experience a constant flow of entertaining conversation. These short periods of relaxation passed all too quickly. Her quick, piercing glance rested in turn kindly and sympathetically on each of her daughters, for she must needs assure herself that all were well and happy. She addressed words of affection to one, of encouragement to another, according to individual needs. At intervals she introduced with unction and faith a passing word which recalled higher things, and renewed in their souls the remembrance of their holy calling. The first mothers of the Society, as they looked upon her and listened to her words, felt how privileged they were in having her for their mistress in the science of the saints. These fervent helpmates of the saintly Foundress conducted themselves in so religious a manner that they gave constant edification to the town, especially when

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Laurel Hill, Limerick

Founded 1844 [*See p.* 218]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Bellerive, Prince's Park, Liverpool

Founded at Great George's Square, Liverpool, 1844. Removed to Prince's Park, 1886

[*See p.* 219]

they were accompanying the pupils to the parish church. Their recollection, their composed and gentle manner, often called forth pleasing remarks. Indeed, many young persons sought occasions to meet them. One day a young girl turned to her friend in the street and said: 'If God calls me to His service, I shall join Madame d'Houet's Congregation, for there are no half measures there'. As a matter of fact she joined the Society soon afterwards."

Madame d'Houet's two letters quoted in this chapter have told us of the early vicissitudes of the house of Amiens. Let us now take a rapid glance at its subsequent history. In order to continue her work of charity towards the most forsaken children, the Foundress rented for some years from the Minister of War, the Duke of Clermont-Tonerre, a disused barracks. But when the religious works which had been ruined by the Revolution were reorganized, Madame d'Houet discontinued those she had undertaken only to supply a passing want. Thus it came to pass that the *raison-d'être* of the Amiens convent underwent a change. The day school was closed for want of room and because other exiled religious orders were recalled. The instruction of poor women and girls lasted for some years longer, but when the communities instituted for that special end had returned to Amiens, this too was discontinued. The boarding-school which in the first instance had been intended for poor children now began to draw pupils from the middle class, though some poor children were still received and had a separate portion of the house reserved for them. In 1846 Madame d'Houet purchased at Camon, close to Amiens, a pleasantly situated property on the banks of the Somme, whither the orphans and poor children were transferred. The convent at Amiens then became permanently a boarding-school.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUNDATIONS AT CHÂTEAUROUX, NANTES, SAINTE-ANNE-D'AURAY.

Madame d'Houet has told us that her journey to Paris, in 1822, was the means made use of by God to give several valuable subjects to her Society. Amongst those we may mention Mother Anna Raven who died at Châteauroux in 1827, Mother Honorine Moreau who died at Carouge in 1840, and Mother Maria Lessens who died at Limerick, May 30, 1858.

Some months later, in December, 1825, Mother Legrand, whom we have already named, joined. At the end of the next year the first members of the Society, after renewing themselves in the spirit of their holy rules by a fervent retreat, separated for the first time in order to establish their second foundation—that of Châteauroux. Madame d'Houet had long wished to have a convent in this town, through which she often passed in her journeyings between Bourges and Amiens. Thanks to the recommendation and friendly intervention of the Bishop of Amiens and of the Archbishop of Bourges, the Prefect of the department of the Indre allowed her to purchase a building formerly used as a town hall. Before the Revolution this property, which was surrounded by extensive grounds, had belonged to a community of Benedictine nuns, one of whom was aunt to Madame d'Houet. In the middle of the quadrangle facing the house stood a lofty, wide-spreading tree. The revolutionists had forced the

nuns to dance round this "tree of liberty," as they fanatically called it, to the accompaniment of ribald songs. Their cells were now empty, the long cloisters were deserted, and the vaulted roof of the sanctuary no longer re-echoed their sweet psalmody. The Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus was full of joy at the thought of repeopling with spouses of Christ these holy precincts, and of restoring the sacred liturgy to the convent chapel. She had some difficulty in purchasing the property, for several members of the municipal council raised objections. But her insistence happily prevailed over all their arguments, and people were struck with the clear judgment and business capacity which ultimately enabled her to carry her point.[1]

At the end of October, 1823, Madame d'Houet and Mother Legrand, with five other religious and two pupils, began the new foundation. They passed the night before the Feast of All Saints under the hospitable roof of M. Claveau, Madame d'Houet's legal adviser. A few indispensable repairs were hastily made, and in the course of the next day they took possession of the new house. Nearly every pane of glass was broken, so there was plenty of work for our amateur-glaziers! The good Sisters lacked everything but the barest necessaries. Still, as they afterwards said, they were a thousand times happier that the rich ones of the earth, and experienced to the full the consolations given to those who joyfully embrace the hardships entailed by voluntary poverty. To them a comfortless straw pallet yielded sweeter repose than the softest down, while the

[1] The local authorities let the house to Madame d'Houet for an annual rent of 1800 francs (about £72). Later on the community took another house which they also rented until the suppression o the convent in 1837.

special grace born of self-imposed privation made palatable, nay even appetizing, the poorest fare.

Meanwhile the Foundress was seeing her way to another development of her work—the training and education of children of the better class. Châteauroux had no such school; and hence it was that the advent of the nuns was welcomed as supplying an existing want in the town and its surroundings. The prefect of the Indre, Baron Locard, who had before held the same position in the department of the Cher, received Madame d'Houet most cordially, and interested himself in the new foundation, which the Archbishop of Bourges, Monseigneur de Vilette, also encouraged.

The Foundress's first care when she opened a convent always was to fix up a chapel, so that He—the Master—might, at the very outset, come into possession of His new home. As His Faithful Companion she chose for her own use, not the most convenient or best situated room, but the one nearest this spot where, to use the word of her patron, St. Mary Magdalen: "They had laid Him". She then placed statues of our Lady and St. Joseph in the sanctuary, and under the protection of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, began her works of zeal. At Châteauroux the Sisters undertook, as at Amiens, the education of the poor children of the town. Their free classes were most successful, and as there was no lack of space the number of pupils rose to several hundreds. Many of the children were very intelligent, and proved excellent and appreciative scholars. School tasks, far from being irksome to them, were made labours of love. Madame d'Houet set aside a large portion of the enclosure for their recreation ground, and there they enjoyed to their hearts' content all kinds of outdoor games. Considering the large number of scholars one

is not surprised to hear that some were not amenable to the ordinary school discipline of the time; so little indeed that it was deemed necessary to separate them from the rest and to give them special treatment. This succeeded, and the most wayward were soon conquered and permitted to rejoin their more docile companions. Experience had taught Madame d'Houet that the good effected in poor schools is only lasting and practical when the children spend most of the day under the direct influence of their teachers. She arranged, therefore, that they should come at seven in the morning and remain until seven in the evening. On Sundays and feast days too, they were encouraged to come to the school. She used to say: "My daughters, let us do all the good we can and never shrink from trouble or work". The Sisters had reason to rejoice at the success of their labours. Thirty years later, as we are told, an aged ecclesiastic of Châteauroux used to say: "The good resulting from Madame d'Houet's foundation still remains". Though she specially loved the poor, this enlightened woman was not blind to the wants of other classes of society. Her zeal extended to all grades wherever and whenever good was to be done. At Châteauroux she was not content with establishing a boarding school for the wealthy, but also opened one for the middle class. Both schools attracted many pupils. She also opened two day schools which likewise prospered. Nor did her zeal limit itself to the setting up of these establishments.

After church service on Sundays and feast days, the Sisters used to assemble the women of the parish. These gatherings were often crowded, and were rendered enjoyable and instructive by the attractive methods used by the nuns. In the summer months

the women met in the open air and there, beneath the shade of spreading trees, discourses on the truths of eternal life, practical lessons on the duties of their state, and instructive reading raised these souls, groping for higher things, from nature up to Nature's God. From time to time hymns were sung making the pleasant woodlands echo with their cheerful notes. Can it be wondered at that the nuns' homely welcome drew those whom they were seeking to attract, or that when the devout gathering dispersed those who had attended it carried away in their bosoms the joy and peace promised to all who taste and see that the Lord is sweet? The task imposed by the indefatigable Foundress upon herself and her companions was laborious, but so great was their zeal that they felt only sweetness and consolation in toil undertaken for the good of souls. When the hour of the community's recreation came and Madame d'Houet's daughters surrounded her, the gathering was ever joyous and cheerful and the conversation genial and refreshing. As at Amiens, so at Châteauroux, in recreation time Madame d'Houet herself was the merriest of the merry. We are told that her flow of bright talk and her winning ways did much to attract and strengthen in their vocation the young postulants who soon flocked in great numbers to swell the ranks of the little community. Most of the postulants were young, but there were exceptions; for instance, Mother Louise Nollet, who at the age of fifty-nine offered herself to the Foundress for her work, and who, after teaching many years in large poor schools, died at Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, in 1841, at the mellow age of seventy-five; and Madame de Courville, who at sixty overcame with courage the many difficulties which age and habits of life opposed to

her vocation, and after some years of religious life died at Châteauroux in January, 1833.

Nevertheless, the venerable Foundress was always yearning to spread yet more the kingdom of God in souls. Like another Saint Francis Xavier, she cried: "Still more, O Lord, still more". She used often to look at the map of Europe, and say with a sigh: "How very little we can do! See all these towns. Even doing our very best we can work for God's glory in so very few, and even where we do toil our poor efforts are all too inadequate." The founding of other convents now became practicable, so many new subjects having joined the Society. Besides, Madame d'Houet was wonderfully energetic, and once she had regulated the affairs of one foundation, her zeal led her to make another. Each department at Châteauroux being soon put under competent direction and all progressing satisfactorily, her presence was no longer indispensable, for she could always direct important matters in letters to the mothers in charge. Divine providence made use of Monseigneur de Châbons, Bishop of Amiens, to direct her steps to the old historic town of Nantes. He gave her letters of introduction to the Bishop, Monseigneur de Guérines. Madame Delaporte, Mother Euphrasie's honoured mother, had also given her a letter to her own brother who was resident at Nantes. But Madame d'Houet, knowing that she was not a *persona grata* with this gentleman, consulted the Bishop of Amiens, as was her wont, regarding the advisability of making use of this introduction. "Do you think, under the circumstances, I ought to make use of this introduction, my Lord," she said. "Certainly, my good Mother," his Lordship replied. So she called on Monsieur Delaporte on reaching Nantes towards the end of November,

1824. The simplicity, not to say the poverty, of her dress, together with her humble demeanour, made the servant mistake her for a beggar and treat her as such. But the master of the house, a man of strong faith and deep religious convictions, on reading his sister's letter made ample amends for this want of courtesy. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to inform her of the unfavourable reports in circulation about her and her newly founded Institute, which was commonly described as a community without name or rules. Madame d'Houet easily justified her plan of action and cleared up the misunderstanding. She passed several weeks at Nantes with this Christian family, and henceforth enjoyed their respect, esteem, and sympathy. Her first step while at Nantes was to wait on the Bishop and present the Bishop of Amiens' letter of introduction. Her courteous host would have wished to take her himself to his Lordship, but the Bishop of Amiens had advised her to go alone. Besides, it was more in accordance with her own wish to trust her cause to God and not to count on human support. At Nantes there were at the time of which we write only cloistered communities, and many parents objected to placing their daughters in convent schools where they could not speak to them except through a grating. This restriction and others induced Monseigneur de Guérines to welcome Madame d'Houet's proposal as a boon for souls and to give it his cordial approval. She thereupon took immediate steps to find a suitable house. At first she was unsuccessful, but finally rented provisionally from the municipal authorities a large building which stood on the site destined later for the erection of the new Exchange. The block had formerly served for a barracks and was in a state of dismantlement more easily imagined than described. It

stood in the midst of extensive grounds, and its gardens and orchards produced much excellent fruit, but as a dwelling house the place was totally unsuitable. After Christmas the religious were able to begin their work, Madame Legrand being once more the foundation-stone. She was aided by three other members of the Society, and they were accompanied by a first pupil for the boarding school. Here, as at Châteauroux they were destitute of almost everything. But such inconveniences seemed mere trifles to the Foundress and her helpmates. The main thing for her was the setting up of a temporary chapel, so as to have Mass, and the Blessed Sacrament reserved. All her efforts were directed to this end, and by the Feast of the Epiphany, 1825, everything was in readiness. Monseigneur de Guérines accompanied by several priests came to bless the humble sanctuary, and to celebrate Mass for the first time within the new convent walls. He was full of fatherly interest and gave expression to a very cordial "Floreat" over the small foundation. The early days of the convent at Nantes were very trying. The only lay-sister had been bitten by a venomous insect, so that instead of being helpful to the other members of the community she had become an additional charge, and Mother Legrand herself was obliged to do the cooking. Meanwhile, Madame d'Houet had been called to Châteauroux on business for a few days, and returned, accompanied by a young nun who had just recovered from a serious illness. The doctor had pronounced her cured, but on her arrival at Nantes she suffered a relapse and had to be nursed day and night. Madame d'Houet began her work at Nantes as usual by opening a poor school. The boarding school was commenced some time later. In the meantime some means of sub-

sistence had to be devised. The little community therefore solicited orders for needlework, and thought themselves happy and honoured in toiling for their daily bread as did the first Faithful Companions of Jesus at Nazareth. They did the mending for three hundred college boys. This was no light task, especially as several of the Sisters, who all told were very few, were very busily occupied all day long in teaching. Some were not expert needlewomen, yet among other things they every week darned three hundred pairs of stockings! One knows what schoolboys' stockings are like. Madame d'Houet always undertook the lion's share of every work. She looked after the sick and was guest-mistress, in which capacity her ease of manner and courtesy charmed all visitors. These early days at Nantes were most trying. Indeed owing to privation in every shape and form, the little community existed in a state bordering on literal destitution. They were lodged with scant comfort, their work was exhausting and monotonous, and their food barely sufficient and mostly unpalatable. They had to purchase their provisions from the gardener in charge of the property, so the same dishes were repeated day after day, for the *menu* was strictly vegetarian. From the beginning of the establishment in January, 1825, until September, there were only two boarders. These Madame d'Houet cared for and taught with the affection of a mother. On the opening of the new scholastic year, however, ten young children, "most happily selected," as she says, joined the two already there. Madame d'Houet continued to act as their first mistress, and in her own sweet, attractive way, awakened in their young souls the desire of becoming pleasing to God.

In the early spring of the following year she took

steps to find a more suitable house, but entrusted the choice to our Lord Himself, and in the end found what she sought. It was an additional happiness in her estimation to gain possession of this building because it had formerly served as a Freemasons' Lodge, and to dedicate its walls to the service of God. For a long time the masonic emblems and devices remained over the mantel-pieces and elsewhere, the nuns considering them trophies of God's victory. This house was situated in a retired and healthy part of the town between two extensive and beautifully laid-out gardens. There was no cramping of space, so Madame d'Houet established three distinct boarding schools—one for children of the upper class, another for those of the middle class, and a third at a very low figure for girls of the artisan class. Later on, when times were bad and the price of food had risen, the local superiors of Nantes were wont to complain that it was all but impossible to keep on this last school, the resources available being so slender. To their remonstrances the holy woman always replied that on no account were they to refuse to accept the children of workmen. "These little ones," she would say, "bring God's blessing on the house." The three schools were entirely separated and the pupils never met except in chapel. Later on, Madame d'Houet purchased another house adjoining the first, and removed the industrial school thither. At the end of some years the convent at Nantes counted a considerable number of pupils.

In this same year, 1826, the foundation of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, the fourth convent of the Society, was made. The early days here also were humble and obscure. Madame d'Houet rented close to the church a small house which contained but one room and a

garret. The solitary chamber served by night as dormitory, by day in turn as kitchen, refectory, workroom, and schoolroom for the poor children of the village. To make room for these varied requirements, the straw palliasses were each morning carried up to the attic.

At Saint Anne's, when visitors wished to speak to the Superior, she was allowed to receive them in the sacristy of the church. The virtues of the holy woman and her companions made a deep impression on all who came into contact with them. Their bright, cheerful manner in the midst of privations was especially remarked. Their food was most frugal. They seldom ate meat and never tasted wine, yet postulants presented themselves; for the hard, austere *régime*, far from deterring girls from joining the Society, was, it seemed, an incentive to their doing so. These generous souls imagined that the hardships to which they were subjected were prescribed by the rule, and would be their portion throughout their religious life. By a happy coincidence, Madame d'Houet was able to purchase for a moderate sum a spacious property, close to the well-known shrine of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray. It was, it is true, but little more than a dry, unproductive moor. Father Lelew of the Society of Jesus, the zealous apostle of Brittany, whose memory is still held in veneration there, from the outset took a keen interest in the new foundation which apparently he had foreseen. He recalled with a full heart and with tears in his eyes how when he used to cross the unfrequented moorland, a presentiment continually haunted his mind and that these words instinctively rose to his lips: "Surely our Lord will find a pleasing habitation here". Madame d'Houet built her chapel and convent on this very spot, and Father Lelew drew up the plans and saw to their

being carried out, while a kind friend, Madame Michel, wife of the doctor of the district, made herself a sort of clerk-of-the-works, and overlooked the workmen and money matters. At the end of the summer of 1826 the house was fit to enter, and the chapel was blessed on January 17, 1827, by Monseigneur Garnier, then Bishop of Vannes. He preached a telling sermon on the occasion, and one well calculated to give a true notion of the ideals and of the holy vocation of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. "The members of the Society," he said, "are called upon to share in the function and in the toils of the apostles." When Mass was over, while the members of the little community were, with tears of gratitude, thanking God for His great mercy, suddenly the venerated Father Lelew rose from his *prie-Dieu* in the sanctuary, and with a voice broken by fervour and emotion, intoned the *Nunc dimittis*.

Almost all the works of the Society were established at Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, where were opened poor schools, with boarding schools for the upper and middle class. A portion of the house was fitted up with small rooms for the accommodation of ladies wishing to make retreats. The spacious and picturesque grounds were laid out under the direction of Father Lelew in park fashion. The foundation appeared at first to promise success, but certain outside changes of administration took place which it matters not to relate here, and for many long years the school eked out a mere existence. It was more than once on the very verge of being given up. However, six years after the Foundress's death God's providence brought about events which revived early hopes, and resulted in what may be called "A Second Spring".

CHAPTER IX.

MADAME D'HOUET'S FIRST VISIT TO ROME.

1826.

MADAME D'HOUET'S first visit to Rome was one of the most momentous events in the annals of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. It took place in the year 1826. She undertook it at the command of the Bishop of Amiens, and has left us the details. "I had from the beginning wished to go to Rome, but whenever I suggested the step to Monseigneur de Châbons, he invariably replied: 'Wait, the hour has not yet come. Remain at home for the present.' When the time finally did come I realized that his Lordship had been guided by Divine providence. At this particular epoch we were going through heavy trials. The Bishop, who had sent for me to talk over our position, said to me: 'This opposition from the Jesuits is becoming too serious; you need strong protection. Go to Rome.' He wrote a letter to the Cardinal Secretary of State, which he kindly read to me. It was a short note of introduction, assuring his Eminence that the most perfect peace and union reigned in our Society, that we had formed all our establishments unaided, and had contracted no debts. His Lordship then gave us his blessing and said, as he bade us farewell: 'Be without fear; all will be well. Have great confidence; God will do everything for you Himself.'

THE MOTHER HOUSE OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS,
63, RUE DE LA SANTÉ, PARIS

Founded 1847. School closed by French Government in 1904 [*See p.* 219]

SANCTUARY OF THE CONVENT CHAPEL AT
RUE DE DA SANTÉ, PARIS

"During this trying time the Jesuit Fathers had addressed several letters of complaint to the Bishop concerning our little community and against me in particular. In one of these communications there was a passage that struck him forcibly, and which he allowed me to read. It ran thus: 'I call your Lordship's attention to this newly established Society, which, from the *éclat* of its beginning gives promise of the great things the Church may expect from it later when it develops.'

"In the beginning of the spring of 1826 our good friend, the Bishop of Amiens, seeing that we were the victims of a petty persecution, decided that the time was ripe for us to seek the protection of the common Father of the Faithful, and to learn from his lips what course we were to take. Before my temporary absence I made a flying visit to our four houses—Amiens, Châteauroux, Nantes, and Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, where I made a retreat of eight days. On my return to Nantes to join my companion, Mother Legrand, I unfortunately fell ill, so we asked the doctor if I were in a fit state to travel. He said that I could do so without fear. Fancying that he might think that the journey was only a short one, I told him that it would be long and fatiguing. He still persisted in his decision. Our Sisters were greatly surprised, and a friend of ours who was present, declared that if he had not heard the doctor's pronouncement with his own ears, he would never have believed it. I took this as a sign of God's will. We left the next day for Amiens, proceeding thence to a small town on the high road to Lyons. There we expected to meet the diligence, but though several passed every day we could not secure places. This happened during the Octave of Corpus Christi. I was still in a very weak state. One day while praying before the Blessed

Sacrament which was exposed, I turned over in my mind the difficulties besetting this journey to Rome. I felt physically unfit to undergo the fatigue. Was it not a rash step at best? As my mind ran on in this strain of thought, I mechanically opened the 'Imitation of Christ,' Book II, Chapter XII, and read the words: 'If thou regardest thyself, thou canst do nothing of all this, but if thou placest thy trust in God thou shalt receive strength from above'. These words comforted me and I resolved to continue my journey.

"It seemed useless to wait any longer for seats in the diligence, so we went to Châlons, where we were more fortunate and obtained places on the canal boat. Starting in the evening we arrived next morning at Lyons. Sometime after we had begun our journey, while Mother Legrand and I were struggling to keep awake, I suddenly heard an interior voice saying to me: 'Take your beads in your hand at once; a great danger is threatening'. I aroused myself, and pressing my rosary tightly between my fingers awaited the issue. All at once the boat struck so violently against some obstacle that the passengers, who were seated or stretched on benches, were knocked down, and a young man who was lying in a corner was thrown into the midst of us. Every one was astonished at the accident which was unprecedented, for the boat was being drawn very leisurely and safely by sure-footed horses. From Lyons we journeyed to Marseilles. I was still very ill and I saw that my companion was alarmed. She was wondering what she would do in case I were to die on the road. Our fellow-travellers were also concerned at my condition, so I once more consulted a doctor in a spirit of faith. But this doctor too, decided that I could continue the journey. Feeling, however, that I was

seriously ill, I instructed Mother Legrand as to the steps she would have to take if I died. We were obliged to wait a week at Toulon, the winds being unfavourable. One day we said the Rosary that the weather might improve. Our prayer was heard, and contrary to the forecast of the sailors the wind changed. I do not say that this was miraculous, but I do assure you, my dear Sisters, that I have known very extraordinary things to come to pass in answer to the prayers of the Rosary. We resumed our journey on Sunday taking the boat advertised to sail first, and were glad to notice that it bore the auspicious name of our Lady: *La Buona Madre di Montenero.* Our voyage was prosperous, and two days later we landed at Leghorn, whence we set out the same evening for Florence. I do not attempt any description of these different towns, my dear Sisters, nor of others through which we passed later on. I went out merely on business, so that I saw little of them. On reaching Florence I made my way to the residence of a canon whom I had known in France, and to whom I had on an occasion rendered a trifling service. I thought he would have been able and willing to help me through his friends at Rome, but I was mistaken. He received me coldly and answered my questions in a curt and indifferent manner. However, he suggested that as I passed through Siena I ought to call on the Archbishop, though he gave me to understand that his Grace might probably be in the country giving Confirmation. I had known the Archbishop when, as a simple priest, he was an exile in France.[1]

[1] It will be remembered that Madame d'Houet in the early years of her widowhood had given hospitality to some of the Italian priests who sought refuge in France. The reader will recognize in the

I was almost glad to hear that he might not be at home, for I expected the same sort of reception as the canon had given me. I thought he might very likely consider it imprudent to have his name and patronage associated with an undertaking about which he was ignorant. When I reached Siena I left my companion, who was very tired, at the inn, and went to the Archbishop's palace alone, expecting to see no one. I took an interpreter to direct me. While we were on our way, a priest stopped me in the street and said: 'Madame, are you not a French nun?' I gave him an ambiguous reply. He continued: 'There are two expected here to-day. The Archbishop is awaiting their arrival with great impatience. He has just been called away to give confirmation to a dying person, but has left me here so that I may inform him immediately when they arrive.' I then told him that I had a companion, that I was French, and that I had the honour of knowing his Grace. So he concluded that we were the persons in question. He wanted to take me at once to the palace, but I asked to be allowed to remain in the church until the Archbishop returned. In a short time I heard the sound of carriage wheels. I stayed for a few moments longer in the church to give his Grace time to enter his palace. What was my surprise to see him hurrying towards me with the greatest eagerness. With a glad expression, and in tones of unfeigned joy, he came up to me repeating: 'Ah, what a consolation God has sent me!' The Archbishop is a saint, one whom virtue and merit rather than his distinguished birth have, in spite of his repeated refusals, elevated to the episcopacy. 'Come,' he said, 'come at once into my house;

Archbishop of Siena the Abbé Mancini, mentioned earlier in the work.

for I have much to say to you'. On our way he remarked: 'Groberto wrote telling me that you were on your way to Rome to procure relics. I have a very fine reliquary which I am going to ask you to accept.' When he reached his reception room he looked at me very intently. He then went on in the saintly, sympathetic manner which is characteristic of him: 'You are a religious, are you not? Tell me, are you not going to Rome for something besides relics? Madame, believe me, it is God's will that you should be perfectly frank with me. Yesterday I was giving confirmation in country districts of my diocese, when our Lord commanded me to return to Siena, for such was His will, as He wished to make use of me for an important matter. I had arranged for the visitation of several parishes in the archdiocese and the children had been prepared for confirmation, but I forthwith sent word to the parish priests to cancel my appointments. When I reached home this morning I was much astonished at finding no one here. However, on reading Groberto's letter, I recognized the voice of God and knew that it was for you that I had been brought home.' I cannot express my feelings on hearing such words. I knelt down beside him and told him everything about us as simply and as clearly as I could. The Archbishop then said with much benignity and sympathy: 'I am in a position to be very helpful to you. One of my best friends happens to be a prelate who enjoys the entire confidence of the Holy Father and who can speak to him freely.' The Archbishop decided that we were to stay in his house and to rest ourselves for a few days, while he went on with his visitations. Next morning he celebrated Mass for our intentions and said to me: 'Do not be anxious; all will be well'.

"We left Siena on June 21, Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, immediately after Mass. At Viterbo we had the consolation of venerating the body of St. Rose and of kissing her hands and feet. The body is entire and is dressed in the religious habit. The Sisters of her convent promised to invoke her during nine days for our intention. On June 24, Feast of St. John the Baptist, we heard Mass two hours before we reached Rome, in the small chapel in which St. Ignatius heard from our Lord's own lips the reassuring words: 'I will be favourable to you at Rome'. Our first act on reaching the Eternal City was to visit the tombs of the Apostles. On our way to St. Peter's we turned into a church dedicated to our Lady and begged our dear Mother to give us her blessing, and to remind Her Divine Son that we had come to Rome only because it was His will.

"We had been advised to present certain letters of recommendation without delay to a religious residing in Rome. A priest of whom we asked the way had the charity to conduct and introduce us. But the good religious declined to have anything to do with us; all he did was to reproach us with not having secured apartments in advance, without, however, offering to render us any service in the matter. I cite these traits, my dear Sisters, and many of a similar kind happened, in order to show you very distinctly that, unless God Himself had helped us, we should never have had any success in our undertaking. It is a remarkable thing that nothing turned out satisfactorily which had not an immediate and direct reference to our mission. Next day was Sunday. We passed it in prayer, begging God to grant us the grace to be submissive in all things to His Divine will. We visited that world-famed church,

the Gesù, and prayed fervently before the statue of the Sacred Heart which is so especially honoured there, and afterwards before the tomb of St. Ignatius. The shrine of St. Francis Xavier contains his right hand—that hand which opened the gates of Paradise to many thousands. I felt so impressed when I venerated this relic that I would gladly never have left the spot. The Holy Name is emblazoned over the entrance of the church ; it stands out in every prominent position in the side chapels and especially over the high altar. Supporting the railing that separates the sanctuary from the nave, are angels in bronze, bearing in one hand a lamp and in the other a scroll inscribed with the name 'Jesus'. We also prayed at the tomb of St. Aloysius in the church of St. Ignatius. I never beheld anything so beautiful as the altar there. On the next day, June 26, we called on the Cardinal-Secretary-of-State, but were allowed to go no farther than the first ante-chamber, where an official in black uniform took the Bishop of Amiens' letter and bade us return next day. We then went to Monsignor Soglia's residence. Here again the attendant put us off, but some one present, who happened to hear us name the Archbishop of Siena, took the letter of introduction. We were at once ushered into the Monsignore's presence. He was most cordial and invited us to call on the following Friday. The next day we again went to the Secretariate of State, and the same official told us that we were to return that afternoon at four. He said this to get rid of us. We presented ourselves anew at the stated hour. The heat was oppressive, and on entering the first ante-chamber we found the attendant leaning on the table half asleep. To our inquiries he replied that we could only see the Cardinal at six o'clock. Whilst

waiting, Mother Legrand and I visited a neighbouring church. The heat was so intense that we did not dare to venture as far as St. Peter's, but we had the happiness of beholding the Pope for the first time. He drove past at a little distance from where we were standing. On our return to the Secretariate the same official came forward, and with scant courtesy informed us that it was impossible to see the Cardinal. He suggested that we should return on the Thursday, after the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, and then, perhaps, we might have better success. On Wednesday we were privileged to see the Pope officiating at St. Peter's and to receive his blessing at Vespers. He was carried on the Sedia Gestatoria between two great fans. I cannot express what I felt when I gazed on his Holiness, as he gave his blessing gently on the right hand and on the left and looked upon the kneeling throng with indescribable fatherly tenderness.

"On Friday, June 30, we returned to Monsignor Soglia's. He gave us the happy news that his Holiness would receive us in audience on the following Monday. He told us to return to his house on that day at 1 P.M. and that he would accompany us into the Holy Father's private gardens. We arrived before the appointed hour, but he had already left the house. He had given orders to his valet to conduct us to the vestibule through which the Pope was to pass on his way from his gardens, and had bidden him assure us that he would meet us without fail and inform us of the recognized formalities for approaching the Holy Father. We awaited his arrival in vain, for he only appeared at the same instant as the Pope. His Holiness was carried in a sedan chair. Monsignor Soglia bade us follow him at a short distance so that we might enter the vestibule after his

His Holiness Leo XII, Pope 1823-9

Who granted a "Brief of Praise" to the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus
August 2, 1826

Holiness had withdrawn to his apartments. He led the way himself and again promised that he would give us instructions before we had our audience. I was most desirous to act with all becoming reverence and decorum. When we reached the end of the vestibule we saw Monsignor Soglia conversing with several prelates. He made us a sign to be seated. Suddenly one of the papal guards in white uniform threw open the door next which we were, made a sign to Monsignor Soglia, and at the same instant all fell on their knees. It was the Holy Father. He went straight into his apartments. The door remained open and Monsignor Soglia beckoned to us to go in at once. I implored him to tell us what we were to do. He replied: 'Go in quickly. The Holy Father is waiting for you.' Thinking to myself I must act as if our Lord were visibly present here upon earth, I fell upon my knees and Mother Legrand followed my example. The Pope then approached us very kindly. We begged to kiss his feet and he gently raised his foot and said: 'I do not wish to deprive you of the grace attached to this act'. He then turned and went towards the end of the apartment. I followed him, being somewhat recovered from my embarrassment. When his Holiness was seated we both knelt down, and I was quite close to him. There was a couch near and he motioned us towards it saying: 'Pray be seated'. I trembled at the thought of being so close to his Holiness and I said in a quivering voice: 'This is not possible, Most Holy Father'. He answered with a smile 'Not possible. Well I do not wish to distress you. Remain standing if you prefer to do so.' I made a further effort but I trembled so much that I nearly fell. The Pope seemed very touched at my emotion and said in a kind, fatherly tone: 'Very well, take whatever position you

please'. So I knelt down. 'It distresses me to see you in this posture,' he said. I replied, 'but I am so happy to remain thus'. The Holy Father then began to speak. It was fortunate he did so, as I was too overcome by my feelings to say a word. He asked me: 'What do you want of me, my child?' 'We desire but one thing,' I answered, 'to do the will of your Holiness. We have four establishments in France. So far we have taken no name, in fact, we have begun in such a manner that these houses can be closed at the first sign from your Holiness.' He replied: 'It is not my intention. On the contrary I should like you to make foundations in every town in France, were it possible.' Then I told him what rule we followed. He replied: 'It is a very holy rule and I approve of it!' I then related all that had taken place between us and the Jesuits, that they had begun the work and deserted us soon after; finally that they bitterly opposed us, but that, in spite of their hostile attitude, I still continued to consult them as my directors and never undertook anything of moment without their approval. His Holiness replied: 'It is well. Do not distress yourself about this action of the Jesuits, for God often permits such things. He has his own designs. Up to the present time you have done quite right in consulting them. It was your safest way. Now that you have laid your case before me, I do not wish you to consult them any longer since they are unfriendly to you.' He asked me if I had called upon their Fathers in Rome. I said I had not. The Pope said: 'It is unnecessary. Do not do so.' He then entered into the minutest details regarding our affairs. We presented our rules to him. He told us to take them to Cardinal Bertazzoli who would examine them

and they would then consider them together. After a short pause the Holy Father said : 'This work is not yours. It is the work of God and he will direct it Himself, so do not be anxious. I promise you on His part the approval of Holy Mother Church, but this cannot be at present. Whilst waiting for this approval I mean to do all that I can for you. You will have the Church's formal approval later on ; but everything must go through the ordinary course. Rome is accused of being slow in her decisions ; but they are wise and dictated by the Holy Spirit.' He assured us again that our work was God's, and that, in due time, it would certainly receive the high approbation of the Church. He emphasized this assertion several times and each time added : 'I promise you this on the part of God'. His Holiness asked us where we were lodging, and on hearing that we were in ordinary apartments, he replied : 'You would be more comfortable in a convent. Think it over and I will make arrangements for you.' He then offered us money in case we might require it. I told him we had all that was necessary. He said : 'I do not wish you to want for anything. In fact, I forbid you to deprive yourselves of anything needful. Ask Cardinal Bertazzoli for all that you require.' He then went on : 'You have great confidence in Providence, and you have good reason to have it. In this matter you have placed all your trust in God, who has done everything for you. Nevertheless, I think you have perhaps overstepped the bounds of prudence. It would have been wiser to have taken some human means to ensure your being listened to in Rome.' 'Most Holy Father,' I replied, 'the Bishop of Amiens, in giving us his letter to the Cardinal Secretary-of-State, told me it would be sufficient. He assured

me that all we wanted would follow in due course.' The Pope replied: 'What letter is this? Why did not the Bishop of Amiens write direct to me? Since you have this letter, you have all that you needed and I have no fault to find with you, but I wish to see it myself. Call on the Cardinal Secretary-of-State in my name, and request him to show it to me.' It was then, I think, that for the third time his Holiness, with a heavenly expression of countenance and with eyes raised upwards, said: 'Be without fear or anxiety. This is God's work, not yours. It will have the approval of the Church. I promise you this again in His name.' With these words the Pope rose, and blessing us anew withdrew from the apartment, leaving us full of consolation and happiness."

The following are some passages from a memorial which Madame d'Houet drew up for presentation to the Sovereign Pontiff:—

The members of this little Society which originated some six years ago, have, for their object, to imitate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk after him in the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin and of the holy women, and thus to form a band of Faithful Companions of Jesus. With this end they trample under foot the world and the follies of their sex, and march with courage and fidelity beneath the standard of Jesus Christ and His representative on earth, the Holy Father, the Pope. Moreover, they promise to go wherever he wills to send them without making excuses or wishing for anything else, trusting entirely in the promise of Jesus Christ, our Lord: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice and all things shall be added unto you".

We, the members of this Society, have four establishments. We began the first without help. We have not contracted debts, and God has never suffered us to be absolutely without necessaries. He has raised up friends to our assistance who have given us money for the purchase of our convents. Some of these benefactors were total strangers to us.

We are ready to go with the greatest confidence and without hesitation to distant and uncivilized countries; for we feel that Almighty God desires this sacrifice of us and, without exception, we are willing not only to go to these countries but to remain there all our lives long.

The rule which we follow requires great self-abnegation, but it implants in the soul that precious peace of our Lord Jesus Christ which the world cannot give. In this little Society the interior spirit and its inseparable companions, poverty, humility, obedience, and gentleness reign. I have never seen the least want of charity amongst our Sisters. Each one is occupied with her own faults. I take the liberty of assuring his Holiness that I state nothing but the simple and entire truth.

Our little Society has also for its object to honour and glorify the Sacred Heart of Jesus by all the means in its power.

"The same day at six in the evening we went to the palace of the Cardinal Secretary-of-State and asked to speak to the attendant who had taken our letters. I say letters, because the Archbishop of Siena had also written. He accosted us rudely and, in reply to our request, he told us that we could see the Cardinal at Christmas. We then quietly informed him that we had seen the Pope. He replied: 'Yes, you saw him at St. Peter's. Come again at Christmas and you will also see him.' He added scornfully: 'What women are these who ask to speak to the Pope and to the Cardinals? Go away at once, I have nothing more to say to you,' and he pointed to the door. 'Sir,' I replied, 'it is quite possible that you may not want to speak to us, but I want to speak to you and in the name of the Holy Father too. Letters which I placed in your hands have not been shown to him. He has himself sent us to request the Cardinal Secretary-of-State to take them to him at once.' The man turned deadly pale and became as civil and obsequious as he had before been rude and disobliging. He made profuse

apologies and told us to return the next morning at ten o'clock when we should see the Cardinal without fail.

"We arrived three quarters of an hour before the appointed time to find the Cardinal in the hall, on the point of leaving his palace. We knelt for his blessing. He asked us our business and we explained it in a few words. He replied, 'I do not know what letters you allude to, my dear ladies, and I cannot now remain to speak to you. Please return to-morrow evening at six o'clock.' We arrived exactly at the hour named. The Cardinal came to meet us in the hall and was much agitated. He exclaimed: 'Ah, my dear ladies, what trouble you have caused me. Ever since yesterday every one here has been occupied searching for a letter from the Bishop of Amiens, which it appears you presented to an attendant for me. The Holy Father says if it is lost it must be found. We have just come across one and here it is. Please look and tell me if this is the letter in question.' I looked and assured him that it was. He was much relieved and spoke most kindly. He then impressed upon us that God had taken our affairs into his own hands, and he said that he would that same evening take the Bishop of Amiens' letter to the Pope. We next called on Cardinal Bertazzoli. He received us in the most paternal manner and said in the course of conversation: 'My dear Sisters, you wish to love God and help others to love him'. We gave him our rules. He told us that the Holy Father had spoken to him about us, and had desired him to read our rules and to report on them to him afterwards. He then said: 'Ah, if you only knew what a holy Pontiff we have, and what marvels occurred at his elevation to the Holy See. One must have been an eyewitness of them, as it was my good fortune to have been, to realize them.' He then

entered into the details of our business. Next day I brought my answers written out. He was somewhat amused at this, and when we called on him another day said with a smile : 'I told the Holy Father that I had teased you by cross-examining you and that you had brought me your replies in writing in case I might further question you'. At our next visit to the Cardinal Secretary-of-State, when we knelt for his blessing, he said : 'I have a more precious one to give you to-day. The Pope and I have examined your rules. This is what he has commissioned me to tell you.' He then broke off and asked me if we loved these rules. I replied : 'They are dearer to us than life'. 'You wish to observe them with fidelity?' 'Yes, your Eminence. We would sooner die than break them.' 'Very well,' he went on, 'the Pope has read them and he agrees with me in approving them, and he permits you to follow them. He has charged me to give you his blessing in proof of his satisfaction.' The Cardinal told me to draw up the constitutions in detail and to present them to him in this form for the Holy Father, as he had examined only the summary and the principal points. He desired us in the Pope's name to call on Monsignor Marchetti, a very holy prelate advanced in age and infirm, and after explaining our business in Rome, to request him to confer with the Pope respecting the Brief of Praise he intended to give us. Monsignor Marchetti knew French imperfectly and was very busy. He told us that he was willing to help us but could not, and wished us to call on a certain prelate, a friend of his who knew French, to whom he gave us a note of introduction. I did not dare tell him that I preferred not to take this step without consulting the Cardinal Secretary-of-State. As a matter of fact when I did so the

Cardinal was annoyed, and made me go back to Monsignor Marchetti.

"As well may be imagined, Monsignor Marchetti did not receive us very graciously. Nevertheless, he promised to speak to the Holy Father about the Brief. When we returned for our reply, he said curtly: 'I have far more important business to transact than yours. Certainly I did speak to the Pope, but not about you.' We returned to the Cardinal Secretary-of-State, who afterwards reported what had occurred to the Pope. His Holiness said: 'Tell them from me to be without further anxiety, for I intend myself to dictate the words of the Brief which is to be given them'. Then his Eminence spoke of the name we were to bear. I told him what I believed to be the will of God. He made some suggestions to which I replied later in writing. Finally, the Sovereign Pontiff approved of our taking the name we bear and ordered it to be inserted in the Brief of Praise. The Cardinal again questioned me on this point: 'What would you give to be allowed to bear this name?' I answered: 'All that I possess'. He persisted: 'What more?' I replied with great earnestness: 'Your Eminence, if the choice were given me, I would sacrifice myself entirely—all that I am and all that I possess'. He smiled, and turning to Mother Legrand remarked: 'See how afraid she is that we are going to deprive her of it'."

The Pope dictated the Brief on the Feast of St. Ignatius, and affixed his signature to it two days later, on August 2, 1826, the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels.

"The Archbishop of Siena had given us letters for Cardinal Pacca and Monsignor Corsi, a Tuscan prelate, who was his particular friend. Cardinal Pacca received

us in a most cordial manner. He discussed our business, and informed us that usually such matters are brought before the Cardinals and are never submitted directly to the Pope; but that when the legal formalities had been concluded, we should probably be allowed to kiss his feet in one of the churches. We told him that we had already enjoyed the privilege of an hour's private audience. He was astonished and said: 'Oh! if that is the case, you have no cause for uneasiness. Your work must indeed be the work of God. You have begun where others end.' He invited us to return that evening, and said that he would do all in his power to help Cardinal Bertazzoli to obtain the final approbation. Monsignor Corsi was also very genial and kind, and undertook to watch over our interests on our return to France. When we told this to Cardinal Pacca he said: 'That is most satisfactory. Cardinal Bertazzoli and I will push forward the business, and the matter will be settled between Monsignor Corsi and us.'

"Some days later we received word from the Pope through Cardinal Bertazzoli to come again to the Vatican. Monsignor Soglia accompanied us. His Holiness received us in an immense hall of the palace. When we prostrated, the Holy Father approached us with the greatest condescension and kindness. He alluded to our Society in such exalted and eulogistic terms that I was alarmed and said: 'Most Holy Father, I am but a cipher in all this'. He raised his eyes to heaven and with an indescribable expression which I can never forget, replied: 'You have good reason to speak thus. Yes, you have indeed counted for nothing in this work which is truly the work of God alone.' He then allowed us to kiss his feet. I kissed both, and Mother Legrand did the same. It happened that the Pope had

altered his position before she approached, so she had to advance on her knees in order to reach the left foot. He presented it to her with a smile. He gave me a large silver medal stamped with his effigy and a rosary to each of us. He also gave me money to defray the expenses of our journey home. Then he blessed us anew and withdrew. Cardinal Bertazzoli had repeatedly asked us on the part of the Pope if we were in need of money or of anything. I always answered that we had sufficient. When he told me that the Pope wished to see us again, he said: 'If he offers you money, do not refuse'. I told his Eminence that I had no intention of doing so; for our funds were very low at that moment, and that I would have already accepted with gratitude what was offered, if the Pope had not always added: 'If you are in need of it'.

"When we left the Holy Father's presence we went to Cardinal Bertazzoli to say good-bye. We begged him, while thanking him for his own kindness to us, to express our filial and respectful gratitude to the Holy Father. He laughed and said: 'Oh! set your minds at rest on that point. I promise to thank him on my knees in your name.' He then bade us a most fatherly and affectionate good-bye and blessed us. We next called on the Cardinal Secretary-of-State, who gave us a letter for the Bishop of Amiens, and telling us not to be in the least anxious about our concerns, showed us the utmost benevolence and sympathy. We next visited Monsignor Corsi, who spoke to us of God in terms which would have become the lips of the most fervent religious. We left Rome, on August 11, at nine in the evening, and we reached Siena on the Eve of the Assumption. The Archbishop was very busy, as the Dowager Grand Duchess of Tuscany, then at Siena,

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, UPTON HALL, NEAR BIRKENHEAD, CHESHIRE

Founded at Lingdale House, Birkenhead, in 1849. Removed to Upton Hall in 1863

[*See p.* 262]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, HOLT HILL, UPPER TRANMERE, BIRKENHEAD, CHESHIRE

Founded 1851

[*See p.* 250]

took up a great deal of his time. We again stayed at his palace. He gave us valuable advice, and rejoiced with us at the happy result of our journey *ad limina.*"

During the time which Madame d'Houet spent in Rome, in spite of her weak state of health, she led her usual life of poverty and penance. She never spared herself, and put up with the unpleasant incidents of the journey without a single complaint. Indeed one would have said that annoyances gave her positive pleasure. She was most considerate and kind to Mother Legrand who, to her confusion, was in consequence often taken to be the Superior.

CHAPTER X.

TRANSLATION OF THE BRIEF OF PRAISE GRANTED BY LEO XII.

To Our Venerable Brother,

Joseph Peter, Bishop of Amiens.

Leo XII, Pope.

Venerable Brother, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

In the midst of the sorrows in which we are plunged because of the evils afflicting the Church of Jesus Christ at the present moment, God in His infinite goodness and mercy does not leave us without some consolation. For if on the one hand we are deeply saddened at beholding impious and wicked men band themselves together for the overthrow of religion and public order, on the other hand we are filled with joy in learning that in many places the zeal of God's servants is inflamed, and their best efforts directed towards the upholding of religion and, with it, of the fabric of society. Among these devout souls, we number very justly our dear daughter, Marie Madeleine d'Houet, who has presented herself before us to consult us regarding a Society of religious women that she has lately established, which Society she wishes to be entitled The Faithful Companions of Jesus. The end of this Society is to teach and to bring up in Christian morality, young girls, especially those born of poor parents. This design seems to us not only very useful, but absolutely necessary, since it aims at nothing less than to the attacking at its very root of the cause of all public calamities, that is to say, the defective education of the young which is so neglected or hindered at the present crisis. The dangers resulting from this neglect or perversion are as much to be deplored in the one sex as in the other.

The great advantage which religion and society have reason to expect from this new institution are made sufficiently manifest by the

good will and readiness with which it has been received by the devout section of the community in many towns of France.

This, joined to the pleasure it has given us, to listen to the discourse of the pious lady, has made us judge fitting to give our approbation to so worthy an enterprise. Moreover, we desire earnestly to recommend to your care and protection both Madame d'Houet and her Institute.

Wherefore we desire that you heartily commend this Institute to our Venerable Brethren, the Bishops of France, and to other ecclesiastics both secular and regular, so that they may favour, by the force of their authority, Madame d'Houet and her religious, and help them to carry out their zealous works.

In the meantime, we purpose to examine with care the rules which she proposes to give to her Society, so that with God's help we may pass judgment upon them. We pray this merciful God to continue to prosper the good work so happily begun for the glory of His name, for the good of your diocese, and for the Church in France, that land so dear to us.

While our prayers are put up to God for this intention we bestow with affection on you, Venerable Brother, and on the flock entrusted to your care, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the second day of August, of the year, 1826. In the third year of our Pontificate.

LEO XII., *Pope.*

We add a translation of the letter addressed by His Eminence Cardinal Somaglia, Secretary-of-State, to the Bishop of Amiens.

MY LORD BISHOP,

Madame d'Houet and her companion, whom you commended to me by letter on their arrival here from France, are on the point of leaving Rome. Their departure is sincerely regretted by those who have enjoyed the privilege of admiring closely their rare and admirable virtues and the spirit which animates them both, especially Madame d'Houet herself. All here were pleased to welcome them with the interest claimed both by themselves personally and by the object of their visit. They have happily attained the end of their mission, and I hope that they leave us with no desire unrealised. The Holy Father desires most earnestly that they may

succeed in extending their field of labour more and more widely, so that the looked-for success may result. May the sympathetic protection which your Lordship gives to these new establishments in your diocese, and that which the Foundress hopes to receive from the other Bishops of France, ensure the accomplishment of this wish of the Head of the Church.

On Madame d'Houet's return to France her first visit was to the Bishop of Amiens. When she unfolded the Brief of the Sovereign Pontiff, the venerable prelate, taking it in his hands, fell upon his knees and kissing it reverently blessed Almighty God for the success of her mission.

Acting on his advice the Foundress addressed letters to the Bishops in whose diocese she had convents, apprising them of the results of her journey to Rome and enclosing a copy of the Brief of Praise. She also wrote to the same effect to several other important personages whom it was considered necessary to inform of what had happened. But in some quarters a strong and persistent opposition arose. The special grievance was the name "Faithful Companions of Jesus". This name, which for six years had been carefully hidden in the heart of the Foundress, as she did not wish to assume it until authorized to do so by the Vicar of Jesus Christ, appeared for the first time in Leo XII's Brief of Praise. Her opponents endeavoured to induce her to change it, and threatened to employ all their power in Rome to force her to do so. Madame d'Houet replied that the cross with which they menaced her might be a heavy one, but that she would not alter the name of her Society since it held it with the sanction of the Sovereign Pontiff. The one thing this intrepid woman feared was lest she should not carry out God's designs. Human opposition never held her back. She informed

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, ADELPHI HOUSE, SALFORD, MANCHESTER

Founded 1852 [*See p.* 250]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, THE HOLLIES, OAK DRIVE, FALLOWFIELD, MANCHESTER

Founded at Brook Street, Oxford Road, Manchester, in 1854.
Removed to Fallowfield in 1900 [*See p.* 251]

her adversaries that she would lay the case before the Bishop of Amiens, and, moreover, that she submitted beforehand to his decision, whatever it might be. She was as good as her word, and addressed to the Bishop a full account of her position. We quote his reply.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

We have neither the wish nor the power to hold back your work. Advance, therefore, to the goal by the path which has been traced out for you. Go forward with courage, but at the same time, with prudence. You must not hide the glorious name you bear, though you have no need to publish it on the housetops. In every diocese where you have a foundation, follow the rules of prudence dictated by the Bishop. The storm will, I hope, blow over, but even if it is to wreck your hopes, be ever submissive to God's holy will.

I am interrupted and therefore conclude in haste. I give my blessing to you and commend you to Him whose Faithful Companion you wish to be.

J. P., *Bishop of Amiens.*

No trials daunted Madame d'Houet, nor did her courage flag. She marched on towards the goal which had been set before her and never allowed herself to be arrested by words of blame, threats, hostile proceedings, or by human considerations of any sort. She left to our Lord the care of upholding her work in the carrying out of which she saw so vividly that she was but a poor, insignificant instrument in her Master's hands. Nor, as we shall see, was her confidence misplaced.

CHAPTER XI.

ELECTION OF A SUPERIOR-GENERAL. MADAME D'HOUET'S JOURNEYS TO BOURGES AND ELSEWHERE. HER SERIOUS ILLNESS. FOUNDATION AT LANGRES.

1826-1829.

In Leo XII's Brief of Praise, obtained as we have seen in so wonderful a manner, the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus realized that its existence was recognized and patronized by the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and that if we may so express ourselves, it had taken its place in the ranks of the Church. The saintly Foundress now deemed the time had come to proceed to the regular election of a Superior-General. In her humility she believed she would be thereby relieved from office. She had so lowly an opinion of herself as to be persuaded that God would inspire her daughters to choose some one else to continue the work she had begun, but for the carrying on of which she, in all sincerity, judged herself unfit. The professed religious, therefore, were summoned to Nantes at the beginning of November, 1826, and there the election took place. As it was not possible for all these entitled to vote to attend in person, some of them from Amiens, Châteauroux, and Sainte-Anne-d'Auray had to be satisfied with sending their votes. These were added to those of the members actually present, who also voted in writing as is customary in such proceedings. We

give, *in extenso*, the votes of three of the religious—Mother Legrand, Mother Julia Guillemet, and Mother Maria Lenssens.

Mother Legrand wrote :—

"I hereby certify that I give my vote to Reverend Mother Marie de Bengy d'Houet, because I believe that she can govern this Society better than anyone else. She has the necessary experience, she knows all her daughters, and she loves them all with motherly affection. I also think that she ought to be elected to the post, because she has always acted with great purity of intention, and because no human consideration ever influences her in the management of affairs, she being intent only on pleasing God, in whom she places all her trust. No obstacle ever deters her from carrying out God's will, and she acts in all circumstances with energy and perseverance. Humiliations, far from diminishing her zeal for the glory of God, only rouse her to greater efforts. She bears with the imperfections and weaknesses of the novices with admirable sweetness and forbearance. When she needs to correct them she does so with gentleness tempered by firmness. We all are striving to profit by her admonitions for they are the outcome of true charity. I have only written here what I feel before God to be the absolute truth."

"I declare," says Mother Julia Guillemet, "that I, Julie Marguerite Marie Guillemet, having examined the matter seriously and carefully before God, elect as Superior-General of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, our Reverend Mother, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy d'Houet, she being the best fitted to direct this Society. Besides, does it not seem clear that such is the will of God, since He has Himself

chosen our Reverend Mother to begin the Society? Who better can guide us than one whom God Himself has elected to the position, and who has never had any other object in all she has suffered and in all she has toiled for than to promote His greater glory, and to lead her daughters to serve Him by the exact observance of their holy rules."

Finally, Mother Maria Lenssens thus expresses herself :—

"I, Maria Marguerite Lenssens, having implored the light of the Holy Spirit, and having examined the matter before God with the greatest care, judge best fitted for the post of Superior-General of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and elect to the same, our Reverend Mother, because I have at all times noted in her an absolute trust in God, an indefatigable courage, and an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls. These reasons, joined to her exceptional prudence and deep humility, make me judge that no one better than herself is able to guide us in the path of salvation and of perfection, and to promote the general good of the Society and the greater glory of God."

Madame d'Houet on seeing herself elected unanimously to the position of Superior-General, was exceedingly grieved. The humble opinion she had of herself, and the high esteem in which she held several members of her Society, made her invent a thousand reasons in favour of a second taking of votes. In deference and obedience to her entreaties the election was repeated. The result was unchanged, so she was forced to accept the burden which her humility had prompted her to decline.

From this moment to the very hour of her death she devoted herself more resolutely than ever, and

211, Avenue Longchamps, Uccle, Brussels

Present residence of the Superior-General (since the religious troubles in France)

rather by example than by words, to enforcing the observance of the rules. For this end she paid frequent visits to her convents, practising in her journeyings the strictest poverty and mortification. She always engaged the poorest places in public conveyances. "We are poor people," she would often say, "and we ought to travel as the poor do." Although she was in continual bad health she bore without a murmur the discomforts and fatigues which this practice of poverty entailed. In the towns where business detained her she selected, it is true, a respectable hotel, but always the most unpretentious to be found. She chose the least comfortable and most inconvenient rooms, and, in the same spirit, avoided any outlay not absolutely necessary. In consequence, she frequently met with humiliation and rebuffs. In the boats and stage-coaches she travelled by she never lost a moment, busying herself with knitting or other needlework so as never to lose time. The frequent travelling she cheerfully undertook in the interests of the Society, often in severe weather and in extreme discomfort, the many nights spent in comfortless vehicles, during a period of thirty-eight years, give us an idea of her courage and endurance. Besides journeys taken in the interest of her religious communities, others devolved upon her on account of her duties as a mother, for she was obliged to go twice a year to Bourges to supervise the management of her estate all the time that her son, Monsieur Eugène de Bonnault d'Houet, was too young to attend to his own interests. Before her father's death she used, in company with one of the lay-Sisters, to stay at his house where they led their religious life so far as their surroundings permitted them. In the early days of the Society, her interviews with her father were often

very painful. M. Bengy, however, soon rose above purely natural feeling, received his daughter with every mark of esteem and affection, and showed her and her companion that Christian courtesy and respect which were the outcome of his faith.

On one occasion Monsieur de Bengy was absent from home, when Madame d'Houet reached Bourges with her companion. Finding herself free to follow her own inclination, though ill and tired she installed herself in a garret, and forbade anyone to be allowed to enter. In the meantime, her sister, Madame de Champigny, hearing of her arrival, as none of the family were in residence, hastened to provide for her wants. Madame d'Houet refused to allow her sister to come to her, informing her through the lay-Sister that it was not customary for a religious to see her relations when she was confined to her cell. She added: "Tell her if I get worse, I can go to the hospital". "It would perhaps be better," replied Madame de Champigny, "for there, at least, she will be obliged to accept proper treatment and care." Madame de Champigny lost no time in informing her father of her sister's arrival. He returned home the next day to find his saintly daughter very ill and compelled her to accept the care which her state demanded. When fairly convalescent, she was at her own request removed to Châteauroux, and here in 1825 became so seriously ill as to cause the gravest anxiety to all concerned. Though in continuous delirium, her very wanderings were those of a soul enamoured with the love of God; she prayed incessantly, and begged those around her to pray. One day her nurses found it difficult to make her take a disagreeable remedy. It occurred to one of them to say: "Mother, I think that you forget by refusing to take this medicine you are not complying

with an order of obedience". At these words she turned with a smile and said: "Give it to me quickly," and in spite of the delirium, she never again showed the slightest difficulty in taking the prescribed remedies. One day the doctor found her so very ill that it was thought she ought to receive the last Sacraments that very evening. It was midnight when the ceremony was over. She passed two hours in a kind of agony which was succeeded by a state of coma. When she awoke she asked for one of her daughters, whom she said they would find in the chapel, at the foot of our Lady's altar. They thought she was still delirious as it was believed that every one was in bed, but the religious was found in the spot pointed out by the holy woman. As soon as Madame d'Houet saw her, she held out her hand and kissing her affectionately said: "Do not grieve any longer; your prayers have been heard. I shall not die of this illness". Then she sent word to the chaplain and to the doctor, neither of whom had ventured to leave the house, that they might now retire. When they had reassured themselves and withdrawn, she soothed her sorrowing daughters, she spoke to them at length of their obligations as religious, pointing out privately certain small defects which she wished to see corrected, and told them many things known only to God and to each individual soul. From this moment she was out of danger, and little by little her health was restored, though her convalescence was long and tedious.

In a small pocket-book there are dotted down in pencil by Madame d'Houet some thoughts which probably relate to this illness: "I should dread very much to appear before God's judgment seat, for I am little prepared to render my account to Him. I am not sufficiently careful to gain indulgences nor to keep my-

self continually in the presence of God. Father Varin used often to tell me never to decide on anything without first recalling the Divine presence and then asking the help of the Holy Spirit. I reproach myself for having corresponded badly with the inspirations which God vouchsafed for the carrying out of His will and for not having tried to suffer for Him. I also regret very much the little union I have cultivated with God. The duties of my position, our wants, our crosses, and the desertion of creatures, ought to have forced me to be closely united to Him. I could so easily have sought the presence of God at least thirty times each day and thus kept Him continually in view. I regret also not having employed all my time and strength in enforcing the strict observance of the rule. My own bad example has kept many persons back in the path of perfection. I have often gratified nature, whereas had I wished, I might have found countless occasions for practising mortification. I deeply deplore having to die without having accomplished what God demanded of me. How distressing it is at the hour of death to . . ."

The passage is unfinished. Such then were the only causes for self reproach which presented themselves to this chosen soul when face to face with death—causes we can well believe exaggerated by a delicate and sensitive conscience.

We have reason to think from the manuscript whence we have transcribed these lines, that Madame d'Houet had made a retreat a short time beforehand, for we next read what follows and which seems to belong to this date.

"At the first meditation I saw at once what God had asked of me for so long a time, viz. indifference to all that can happen to me in this world, good or bad

fortune, honours or humiliations, joys or sorrows, finally the fullest submission to whatever His holy will ordains. What can it matter by what means I arrive at its fulfilment. This holy indifference will banish from my heart all troubles, griefs, and anxieties. It is only God's grace and my fidelity to it which can bring me happiness."

Farther on those beautiful words occur :—

"Great graces! He has discovered to us what we are. He causes us to do good in the midst of humiliations. He does not permit the world to approach us. I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me. He causes peace and union to reign amongst us."

We here insert a remarkable letter found among the Foundress's papers. The precise date is uncertain, but it was very probably written about this period of her life : "Pray for me, my dear Sisters, and do not grieve for my death. I declare before God that I have been as naught in the foundation of this Society, which is entirely and in the fullest sense of the word the work of the Most High. I undertook it when it pleased God and as guided by Him. Once again I beg of you to pray for me. I have nothing more to tell you save to entreat you to follow very exactly our holy rules. Never allow them to be altered. Our Lord Himself will guide you safely as He has done up to now."

On January 28, 1829, Madame d'Houet lost her honoured father. He died a Christian death at the advanced age of eighty-two. He had the consolation of being assisted in his last moments by that beloved daughter who had left him only to fulfil God's higher call. "I recommend to your prayers," she wrote to Mother Julia in the first days of February, "my beloved

and virtuous father who has just passed away here like a true Christian in the peace of the Lord." She also addressed some simple, touching words to Monseigneur Mancini, Archbishop of Siena, who had known and respected M. de Bengy during the days of his exile in France. She says: "I earnestly recommend to your Grace's prayers and Masses the soul of my excellent father who died, as the patriarchs of old, in the peace and joy of our Lord. For many years he had lived a life of constant prayer and always took a great deal of interest in our little Society."

A short time after this event, so painful and yet so consoling, Madame d'Houet made another foundation. The circumstances which brought it about are these: Monsieur Hutinet, parish priest of Bussières-le-Belmont, in the diocese of Langres, had amongst his parishioners a very devout young woman who had given a large house to found a convent and school. She offered herself for the work, and was soon joined by several young persons animated with the same wish. Death prevented her carrying out her intentions, though her gift was not withdrawn. An assistant priest, Monsieur l'Abbé Paul Hutinet, the parish priest's nephew, wrote to Madame d'Houet to ask her to take over the convent at Bussières. This occurred in 1828. The application reached her at the most critical stage of the serious illness just described, and by some oversight remained unnoticed. At the end of nine months she received a second letter. This time she replied and gave the priest the details of the Society for which he asked. Soon after she went to Bussières with Mother Legrand. The parish priest received them cordially and hospitably into his house, where his sister and nephew were residing. However, it was not at Bussières but at Langres that

the new foundation was eventually begun. Madame d'Houet and other interested friends had seen that a greater amount of good could be done in that town.

The Bishop of Langres, Monseigneur Gilbert Paul Aragones d'Orcet, welcomed her kindly and gave her much encouragement. Up to his death, which occurred a few years later, he showed sympathetic interest in the foundation. He often visited the house, addressed kind and fatherly words to the religious, encouraged postulants to join, and, when difficulties arose, frequently became instrumental in obtaining the consent of parents to the following of God's call by their daughters.

A house was rented at Langres and the work begun in the early days of March, 1829, the views of the Foundress being ably seconded by zealous priests. Fifteen young persons offered to join the Society, and one of the priests volunteered to direct the exercises of a retreat so as to give these aspirants a better chance of carefully examining their vocation. Some were found to be wanting in the necessary dispositions, while others were admitted to begin their noviceship as soon as all necessary preparations were completed. Then without further delay ladies' retreats began. The Bishop approved highly of this step, and announced it in his Pastoral for the Lenten season of 1830 in the following terms :—

> We think it our duty to inform persons of the other sex, who desire to secure special means of sanctification, that we have in our episcopal city a new establishment of religious women bearing the name of Faithful Companions of Jesus. In their convent six retreats of eight days' duration will be given in the course of the year. . . Our fellow-workers will, we trust, hasten to recommend their parishioners to profit by these retreats so strongly recommended by all masters of the spiritual life.

The fruits of these retreats were remarkable and consoled the heart of the zealous Foundress.

In 1830, in order to fall in with the views of the parish priest of Bussières, Madame d'Houet again attempted to open a house there, and for this end she sent four nuns and went herself to reside there. In this nucleus of a community no one knew how to cook, so when the dinner hour came there was general embarrassment. Madame d'Houet rose to the occasion, and herself prepared the repast with a success that might have led onlookers to suppose that she had gone through a nineteenth century training in cooking, for she soon had a most comfortable meal prepared. On another occasion, when she was again at Bussières, her daughters had arranged her bed in a room which they deemed suitable and comfortable. She persistently refused to occupy it, objecting to anyone being disturbed on her account. She then had a mattress spread on the floor of a small attic which had served as a store-room for grain, and whence only that very day the cobwebs of years had been swept away, and there took her night's rest.

The Faithful Companions of Jesus remained only six weeks at Bussières. Notwithstanding the esteem in which they were held, and the kindly intentions of which they were the object, Madame d'Houet, after thoroughly examining into the circumstances of the case, came to the conclusion that at least for a time she could not fall in with the wishes of the priest and his people. The resources which the foundation offered were insufficient for the support of eight or ten religious, the minimum number which Madame d'Houet deemed necessary to ensure perfect regularity in a community. Again, Langres was situated at too great a distance from Bussières to make it possible for the staff of that house

Photo: Elliott & Fry

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, DEE HOUSE, CHESTER

Founded 1853 [*See p.* 257]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, ST. MARY'S, BRUFF, CO. LIMERICK

Last Convent founded by Madame de Bonnault d'Houet, 1856 [*See p.* 264]

to go backwards and forwards and help in the teaching and management. Before all other things the Foundress wished to see the rule everywhere carried out in its integrity. This was her reason for consistently refusing to found small establishments, where it was difficult either to practise the rule or to maintain discipline and keep up the religious spirit. The Sisters therefore returned to Langres, where Madame d'Houet soon purchased a more suitable house than the one she had rented, and a boarding school, day school, and retreats began in due course. She likewise established a noviceship at Langres for the formation of the postulants who joined the Society there. At the end of December, when called away to another convent, she wrote the following letter to her dear novices :—

To my dear Daughters and beloved Sisters,

I wish I could write to each of you in particular, but time does not allow me this pleasure. I have already spent part of the night in correspondence. I say to each and all: "Courage, my dear daughters". Courage, confidence, and obedience—these virtues alone are necessary to conduct you to heaven where all our Sisters meet you in spirit. Therefore, pray, love, sing, play, read, skip, if you will, but always with hearts full of joyous submission and obedience. I wish you a Happy New Year and good health. Write to me and give me as a spiritual New Year's gift—three Holy Communions.

Good-bye, my dear daughters,

We shall soon meet again,

Your Mother who never forgets you

CHAPTER XII.

FOUNDATIONS IN ENGLAND, ANNECY, CAROUGE, ESTAVAYER, BOURGES, TURIN.

1830-1836.

One of the works which Madame d'Houet had especially in view was that of foreign missions. Up to the present the means for carrying out this project had not presented themselves, but in her zeal to extend the reign of Christ in souls, she had never lost sight of its possible accomplishment. She had, as we have seen in a previous chapter, suggested to the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XII, that her newly constituted Society should toil for God's glory in distant and uncivilized countries, but at the time God did not ask for this sacrifice. Some years passed before the events occurred which brought about the necessity of establishing convents outside France. It was on seeking the hospitable shores of England that the Faithful Companions of Jesus found the first realization of their Foundress's zealous yearnings for mission work. They were first to plant their standard in London, the very centre of Protestantism, and later on to unfurl it in Switzerland, at the gates of Geneva, the citadel of Calvinism.

The fears occasioned by the outbreak of the Revolution of 1830 were the direct cause of the foundation in England. Madame d'Houet was justly alarmed for the safety of her convents in France.

"After the Revolution of 1830," she writes, "fear-

ing for the existence of our French houses, the only ones we had so far, and our Sisters being resolved never to separate, even were we called upon 'to die together on the steppes of Siberia,' we consulted our Bishops on the plans to take. They advised us to secure without delay a house in another country. We thought of going to England, but I would take no initiative without the advice of the Bishop of Amiens. His decision was for me to be final. I went to Amiens and laid the case before him. He reflected for a moment and then said: 'No, not England, you must go to Belgium'. 'But, my Lord, there is war there.' 'I know,' he answered, 'nevertheless, it is there you must go, and at once.' In another conversation I had with him, he said: 'Should you not succeed in founding a house in Belgium, go to London, and see if one be not possible there'. I thought of a lay-Sister for my companion, but, on the eve of our departure, I decided that Mother Julia Guillemet should accompany me, as she had some knowledge of English. Before we left Amiens, I sent Mother Julia to the Bishop for a letter of introduction which he had promised to give me. This letter bearing no special address was to be presented to any Bishop whose interest we desired. His Lordship gave us his blessing, and then remarked to Mother Julia: 'I believe your Mother's opinion will prevail over mine. Perhaps England after all will give you a place of refuge. Nevertheless, go with confidence whither I am sending you.'

We left that day, October 19, 1830, and reached Tournai next morning. We stayed with a friend of mine, who met us and who had the kindness to accompany us to Ghent. One of her cousins held a high ecclesiastical position. He was an estimable priest and

she thought he would befriend us. But God did not wish us to rely on human means; for the good priest told us in very plain terms that he did not approve of our project and would oppose it. We then called on another priest—Monsieur Bruson—who gave us more encouragement promising to introduce us to the Bishop at his palace. His Lordship received us kindly and we presented Monseigneur de Châbon's letter. He bade us return next day, and told us to call in the meantime on his Vicar-General, Monsieur de Vaucombruge. He too was favourable to our plan. When we met him again the following day, he told us that he had spoken to the Bishop on our behalf, and assured us of his Lordship's patronage. We afterwards again saw the Bishop who granted us all the necessary permissions, saying he was quite agreeable to our opening a convent in Ghent itself, if it suited our convenience. We at once began to look for a house, but while thus occupied, Monsieur de Vaucombruge was named the Bishop's deputy in a transaction which necessitated his leaving Ghent for a time. He told us candidly that it would be more prudent to put off the execution of our plans until his return, as we might need his support against other members of the Chapter who did not favour our projects, nor, he added, could he, speaking in our interest, think the time was ripe. There was rioting already in the very streets of Ghent, and the Bishop, although he invited us to return at some future time, recommended us to wait until peace was permanently re-established. Under these circumstances, we made up our minds to give up the idea of Belgium. I talked the matter over with M. Bruson, and begged him to give me a letter of introduction to some one in England, for we intended to cross over to London.

M. Bruson strongly opposed our taking this journey, and pointed out that to make a foundation in London a capital of four hundred or five hundred thousand francs was absolutely necessary. Moreover, he could tell us everything we wanted to know without our going there ourselves. I was determined, however, in a spirit of faith to carry out the Bishop of Amiens' instructions to the very letter, so I pressed him for an introduction. At first M. Bruson said he knew no one, but, on reflection, remembered that an ecclesiastic from London, a relative of a friend of his, had once called upon him. He took advantage of this slight acquaintanceship to give us a letter of introduction to this priest. In this letter M. Bruson spoke of me as a French lady who desired to consult him on a matter of business. We left Ghent for Ostend on November 8, 1830. Our expenses in this town were defrayed by an English gentleman, an unknown benefactor. He charged our landlady to pay us every attention and to see that we wanted for nothing. Our journey from Ostend to London was a very trying one. The sea was rough and the accommodation in the ladies' cabin insufficient. We contrived, however, to shut ourselves up in a pantry intended only for provisions where there was a single chair, but while there, we were in mortal dread of being discovered and having to pay a fine. However no remark was made, and we stayed there until the rest of the passengers had landed.

The journey lasted two days. We were speedily passed through the Custom House by a gentleman who had our luggage examined without delay. Our passports turned out to be irregular, for the officials in Ghent had not filled them in correctly. Under ordinary circumstances, we were liable to be detained until infor-

mation concerning us should be obtained. I knew that the formalities were wanting, and by a happy accident had left the passports on board the boat. Fortunately, and no doubt God was watching over us, the official whose duty it was to inspect them was satisfied. We had our luggage carried to the nearest hotel, and put on secular dress, for the Bishop of Ghent had advised me not to go about London in my religious habit. We got a fright in this hotel, for mistaking one door for another we found ourselves suddenly in the midst of a crowd of some hundreds of men seated on the floor, in profound silence. Having gathered together our belongings we hurriedly got into a cab, and gave the driver the address which M. Bruson had written on a card. The little boy who called the cab insisted on getting a shilling for his trouble. This gave us an idea of the expense that any undertaking in England would entail, and we already longed to be out of London and back in France. After driving for nearly two hours, and repeatedly asking the way, the cabman calmly drew up and informed us that he could not find the place, and that he would take us no farther. I had feared such a possibility, and we both prayed very earnestly to our Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, of St. Joseph, and of our Holy Protectors, to lead us Himself through this immense city where we had Him alone as our Guide. We made the driver understand, as best we could, that he must make another effort and asked his good angel to direct him. At last we met a kind lady, who, I think, must have been a Catholic. She was well acquainted with the neighbourhood in question, and conducted us to Father Nérinckx. We expected, as M. Bruson had led us to believe, to find a priest living alone with servants in care of his house, but on entering the court-

yard, we found ourselves in the midst of a troop of young girls whose uniform showed that they belonged to a school. Father Nérinckx received us very courteously. After he had read M. Bruson's letter, in which we were described as two French ladies, he called his sister, Miss Nérinckx, and asked her to give us accommodation for the night. She found that this was not possible, but offered to procure suitable apartments in the house of a friend who lived close by. Father Nérinckx had no time to give us any information that evening, as he was due in his confessional, but he promised to do so next day. He invited us to take tea with his sister and to have all our meals with her during our stay in London. I accepted his hospitality which I looked upon as help sent by Divine Providence. We were shown to our apartments, and next morning at eight o'clock a messenger came to escort us to the house for breakfast. I then told Father Nérinckx that I was a religious; I felt I owed him this confidence in return for his great kindness. He laughed and answered: 'You are not telling me a great secret, for both my sister and I came to that conclusion the first moment we saw you'. After breakfast I attempted to speak to him on the object of our journey to London. He interrupted me and said that he had no time to enter into the matter then, but that he would be at my service after dinner. He had no time! Nevertheless, he remained two hours in conversation with us, and later Miss Nérinckx took us through the establishment, giving us the most minute details about its organization without my asking a single question. I was mystified, and, when we were alone, I said to Mother Julia: 'What do you think of all this?' She replied: 'I cannot quite say, but I think God has some design in it'. After dinner Father Nérinckx took

me to his study saying : 'Now I am at liberty to listen to all you wish to tell me'. I spoke of our journey to Belgium, of what the Bishop of Amiens had said, and of what he wished us to do. Father Nérinckx explained to me clearly, as Monsieur Bruson had already done, that to begin an establishment in England 500,000 francs (£20,000) as an initial outlay would be required and that even this amount would not ensure success. To prove this he entered into details of the probable expenses. I thanked him warmly for his information and told him that in the face of what he said, I gave up the idea, and that we should return to France as soon as possible. Father Nérinckx replied : 'You have told me your plans and secrets ; I am now going to tell you mine. The institution here was founded by the Abbé Carron, and was handed over to me by him on his return to France.[1] My sister and I have devoted ourselves to

[1] Extract from the discourse pronounced by the Right Reverend Abbot Gasquet at the first centenary of St. Aloysius' Church, Somers Town, October 4, 1908 :—

In some measure, at least, and I think it must be confessed in a great measure, in the marvellous designs of God Almighty, it was the great French Revolution, which swept away order and religion from France, that was destined to be the greatest blessing to the Catholic religion in this country. This great cataclysm came, in the first place, as an object-lesson to English statesmen and made them realize that the Catholic Church in reality made for law and order, and was opposed by its very constitution to the spirit of revolution which seemed to have gained a sure footing in Europe generally. During the Pontificates of Benedict XIV, and his three immediate successors, the influence of the Catholic clergy had been uniformly exercised in support of authority, and as Mr. Lecky, the Protestant historian, points out, nearly all political insurrections of that era had been in countries professing the Protestant principles. For this reason Edmund Burke used the power of his eloquence in favour of the Catholic cause, and pointing to the attitude of the French

carrying on the work. We have enlarged the buildings

revolutionary party towards the Church, said: "If the Catholic religion is destroyed by the infidels, it is a most contemptible and absurd idea that this (English Church) or any other Protestant Church can long survive the event".

But, beyond anything else, it was the Christian charity displayed by the English as a nation towards the bishops and clergy exiled from France, and the genuine hospitality accorded to them, that effected a change, and a lasting change, in the sentiments of the people at large towards the Catholic religion. The presence of a vast number of French *émigré* priests in England did much to familiarize men with Catholics and Catholic clergy, and to teach them that many of the stories which, through prejudice or ignorance, they had been taught to believe about us and our religion, were obviously untrue in fact. In September and October, 1792, more than 6000 French bishops and clergy had been received into England, and that number was shortly increased to over 8000, whilst at the same time more than 3000 priests and ecclesiastics had found a temporary refuge in the Island of Jersey. Besides the money furnished for their support by the English Government, collections were made in almost every Protestant parish church of this land for these *émigré* priests. At one time some 660 of these French priests were lodged at Winchester in the Royal Palace; and in my own early days I recall the fact that my father, who had himself come over from the South of France in those troublous times, used to describe the way in which these priests at Winchester were wont to chant their offices together in the land of their exile, and how their voices could be heard as a mighty wave of sound all over the city. He used further to tell us that the hearts of the French Catholic *émigrés* were deeply touched by the abundant charity of the English nation, and that they felt convinced that God would not fail to bless the people of this land with the riches of His grace for all that they had done for the French exiles in the days of their trouble. . . . I have said that in 1792, upwards of 3000 priests from France had found a refuge in Jersey. Amongst these was one whose name must be on our lips and in our hearts to-day, that is of course, the Abbé Carron. Guy Jules Carron was a brave Breton, born at Rennes on February 23, 1760. He was a man of indomitable energy, exceptional talent, and extraordinary piety. Before the out-

this year at a cost of 80,000 francs (£6000). We often

break of the French Revolution he had already made a name for himself as a writer of spiritual books of acknowledged excellence, as an organizer of charitable works, and as possessing a burning love of souls. He set himself at once to oppose the irreligious and atheistical forces of the Revolution, with the result that in the middle of 1792 he found himself in prison for his religious opinions and under sentence of exile from France. He arrived in Jersey in September, 1792, in the company of 250 priests, his fellow-exiles, and found at Saint Heliers and elsewhere in the island over 3000 other priests and religious, who had escaped from the atrocities being committed in their country under the sacred name of liberty. He had expected to find amongst them a friend of long standing—Jean François de la Marche—the Bishop of Saint Pol whose monumental tablet erected by Abbé Carron still stands in yonder corner. He found, however, that the Bishop was in London, and so he quickly made his way thither to concert with his friend some measures to help the French exiles. The memory, however, of the many needs of the *émigrés* in Jersey so occupied his mind that he returned to that island and threw himself with characteristic energy into the work of organizing schools for the French children, and libraries for both clergy and laity. So successful was he that when, two years later, he left Jersey, he received the thanks both of the authorities of the island and of the British Government for the good he had effected during his stay. It was not, however, for human praise that he laboured. It was duty that ever called him to work with the same single-minded purpose of serving God. It was said of him at the time that he seemed to live always in the presence of God, and to derive all his strength from the thought that God everywhere saw him and read the secret desires of his heart to ever serve Him more and more. During long hours in the night he was seen to kneel in silent prayer, and always, when his difficulties were the greatest, he sought their removal by going to visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. His zeal and single-minded purpose was so obvious that Protestants of means came forward to support him in his works of charity. . . . In 1795 a French army gathered under General Hoche on the coast of Brittany with the avowed intention of making a descent upon the Island of Jersey; and the English Government fearing the possibility of the exiles falling into the hands of the revolutionary forces obliged

think with regret that if one of us were to die, the under-

them to cross over to England. Abbé Carron arrived in England some time in the September of 1796, and at once began to dream of some institutions after the model of those which had proved so useful in Jersey. He found his friend the Bishop of Saint Pol de Léon established in the house of a pious English lady whose name deserves to be remembered. This was Mrs. Silburn who had turned her home in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, into a refuge for French priests. Here the Bishop of Léon set up a central office to afford assistance to the French emigrants, and to this place all alms were sent for distribution. After consultation with his friend, the Bishop, Abbé Carron's first endeavour was to establish in London, schools for the children of the *émigrés*, and finding that they had congregated in this neighbourhood, then a country suburb of the great city, he took two houses in Tottenham Place, Tottenham Court Road, and set up there two schools under the direction of competent French gentlemen and ladies. The reason for the choice of this neighbourhood is not far to seek. The pleasant country village of Somers Town a short time before had been invaded by the builder, with the result that, as so frequently happens on the outskirts of great cities, the building was overdone, and many houses after remaining long in carcasses were sold for less than the materials had cost. This attracted the poverty of the French exiles and the houses were quickly completed and occupied by the French colony. Abbé Carron on his arrival in London was absolutely without means of any sort, but experience had taught him that Providence helped those who, working for God, relied upon His assistance with entire confidence; neither were his hopes disappointed in all the years of his ministry in this neighbourhood which followed. To the Bishop of the London District, Dr. Douglas, the schemes of the energetic French priest appeared rash and dangerous, and on the occasion of a visit made to the new schools in company with the Bishop of Léon, Abbé Carron's devoted friend, the cautious Bishop Douglas ventured to express his astonishment and alarm. "Oh!" replied the Bishop of Léon, "this is nothing. I am quite used to see the Abbé work miracles!"

In 1798 the Abbé Carron opened his first humble chapel for the French *émigrés* at "6 Garden Gate, corner of Brill Place, Skinner Street, Somers Town" and this, 110 years ago, was the beginning of the Catholic parish. He soon afterwards removed his boarding-

taking would fall to the ground, so we earnestly desire

school for youths from Tottenham Place to No. 3 Phœnix Street, and that for young ladies to No. 1. At this time in these establishments he had eighty boys and sixty girls, and as most of them were the children of *émigrés*, who were in great poverty, he received very little from his pupils, and had to gather the necessary support from others. Here, and in other matters, he gratefully acknowledged the generosity of non-Catholics, and indeed it would have been impossible for him to continue and extend his charities as he did, but for the help of Protestants. In the years that he was in London it is calculated that this true apostle collected and expended on his various works considerably more than £100,000.

On the removal of his schools in 1799 to Phœnix Place, Abbé Carron turned his houses in Tottenham Place into a home for infirm and aged *émigré* priests. This was a great need, for all round this neighbourhood there were gathered numbers of priests who could obviously find no employment of a sacerdotal character, and who had to gain a precarious living as teachers of music, drawing, or modern languages. I can myself remember being shown hard by here the little house where one of the last of these priests had lived, who had gained a slight addition to the pension of thirty-five shillings a month, nobly allowed to these men by the British Government, by raising in his little garden and making French salads for the tables of the rich. Many of these men were too old to help themselves, and so into the two houses above named Abbé Carron collected some forty of them whom he cared for with all the love of his great heart, till they were laid to rest in the old cemetery of St. Pancras. . . . In 1807, Abbé Carron determined to build a proper church. He did so, and practically became the founder of the mission of Somers Town. Amidst all his work, charitable and parochial, the Abbé Carron found time to continue his literary labours. Besides this, in the abundance of his zeal, he directly, or indirectly, assisted in the establishment of other missionary centres in London; and Hampstead, Chelsea, and Kensington at least can point to French influence for their first beginnings. Moreover, the reputation of Abbé Carron for solid piety brought many people to Somers Town to seek his advice. Thus it is probable that the great Chateâubriand came here for that purpose to Clarendon Square to seek his friend, the Abbé. Hither too came the young de Lammenais, when in doubt of his

that a religious community should take over the charge and direction. We have always felt convinced that God would, in His own good time, send those whom He has chosen to replace us. We have often tried to find nuns, but no negotiation has ever been satisfactorily concluded. Yesterday, on your arrival, both my sister and I felt that you were the persons so destined by God. Moreover, what is still more surprising, every one in the house is under a like impression. The eight young persons who help us are desirous of embracing the religious life. The furniture belongs to us and we have no debts. I now formally offer you all and only ask your acceptance. My sister and the teaching staff wish to join your Society and to follow your rules. You are at liberty to receive them or not as you please ; and you are equally free to

vocation, and it is more than probable that it was within these walls within which we are now gathered that this erratic and gifted man determined to become a priest. Alas! that the generous emotions stirred up within his heart by the Abbé Carron failed in the end to preserve him from the pride which led to his defection from the Church. In the year 1814 the Abbé Carron's connexion with England came to an end. Louis XVIII himself urged him to return to France and work for the restoration of Religion in his native land. Bishop Douglas, the Vicar-Apostolic, decided that it was his duty to obey the call of his sovereign. The letter he wrote in saying his adieu shows the depths of his feelings and the genuine affection he had for what he calls "my large colony of Little France of Somers Town". The pain of his departure was somewhat soothed because he left behind him to carry on his work a man after his own heart—Father Jean Nérinckx, a native of French Flanders and an *émigré*, who took up his works of zeal, his schools, etc. It was my privilege to know this venerable and venerated servant of God. Cardinal Wiseman records his high opinion of his virtues in a letter addressed to my father who, as a lifelong friend and as his physician, had stood by the bedside of this saintly priest in his last hours.

Abbé Carron himself had died in 1821. His sorrowing friends in England placed a monument to his memory in this church.

dismiss them, if you find them unsuitable.' I replied that I accepted with lively gratitude his generous offer, because I believed, as he did, that such was God's will, and that his proposal was only one more instance of the tender watchfulness of Providence over our Society. However, I begged that he would decide nothing officially until he had obtained information concerning us from the Bishops in France. He assured me he was perfectly satisfied, and only wanted time to speak to his own Bishop and obtain his sanction for the act of conveyance.

"Bishop Griffiths,[1] when he was approached on the matter, replied: 'I cannot give my consent until I see them myself'. Father Nérinckx conducted us without further delay to his house. His Lordship asked us many questions about our Society and work, and in conclusion said: 'I do not wish this establishment to become French nor that the children cease to speak English'. I told him that some of our Sisters already knew a little English, and that the teaching staff of the school did not intend to leave but, on the contrary,

[1] The Right Reverend Thomas Griffiths was Vicar-Apostolic of the old London District, now the Dioceses of Westminster, Southwark, and Portsmouth. He died August 12, 1847. His successor, Nicholas Wiseman, Bishop of Melipotamus, who, on the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy by Puis IX in September, 1850, became first Archbishop of Westminster and Cardinal, was a staunch and loyal friend to the Faithful Companions of Jesus. He frequently visited their convents and presided at Religious Ceremonies in their chapels. Cardinal Manning, who followed in his footsteps, in one of his letters to a priest says: "The Faithful Companions of Jesus are my staff-officers in the diocese and I have great confidence in them" (10 Dec. 1888). The two Archbishops and Cardinals who succeeded him in the See of Westminster have shown equal appreciation and esteem for the Society.

wanted to embrace the religious life. I then suggested that his Lordship should write to our Bishops in France, who would give him full information concerning us and our special work. He replied: 'That would take too long. I am satisfied with you and I am of Father Nérinckx's opinion that it is God's will you should remain in this country. On your return to the house, have the keys, account books, and papers handed over to you; and write, to-morrow, to France for other Sisters to help you'. When we left the Bishop, Father Nérinckx took us to visit Father Scott, a kind and learned Jesuit. He received us very cordially and gave us every encouragement. A few days later he called and showed marked kindness and interest, so that henceforth we consulted him on all matters of importance. One day he said to Mother Julia: 'Do not be surprised that I take so much interest in your Society; it is God's will that I should do so. The first time I saw your Reverend Mother, an interior voice admonished me to help you, as God had sent you here for the good of this country and to promote His glory.'

"We took possession of the house at Somers Town on November 16, and there were general rejoicings there when the Bishop's decision and our own were announced. All, not excepting Miss Nérinckx, vied with one another in showing us respect, obedience, and affection. God's hand was indeed manifestly visible, for these young people, and still more Miss Nérinckx, were accustomed to have great liberty and to follow their own will more or less freely. Anything like independence disappeared immediately, for the rule was at once put into force and observed. What is still more astonishing, the spirit of our Society, gentleness, humility, and charity, was at once as thoroughly understood and practised as in any

other of our houses. The only rivalry that ever arose between the English and the French Sisters was as to who could forestall the other in charity and consideration. All this shows that God was the bond which united us. The spirit at Somers Town has remained unchanged since those first days. It blooms to-day in all its early freshness.

"I wrote to the Bishop of Amiens to inform him of the result of our expedition. He replied: 'My dear daughter, I knew God wanted something from you, but I did not think that matters would have been settled so promptly!'

"Two months after my arrival in London I returned to France accompanied by Miss Nérinckx. Father Nérinckx had decided this on the advice of the Superior of the Christian Brothers, his friend. This wise religious thought that if Miss Nérinckx did not join the Society it might be awkward for her to remain in an unofficial position in the house where she had so long been sole mistress. She was full of sympathy and friendliness, and when the English Sisters gathered round her to bid her an affectionate and grateful farewell she asked for the French Sisters who, through delicacy of feeling, had withdrawn. 'I leave,' she said, 'without anxiety and indeed with joy, for I feel that this house is in such capable hands. I can truly say that the English Sisters are very dear to me, but you, my French Sisters, are equally so.'"

God helped Mother Julia wonderfully. She took over the charge of the house, went to the parlour without an interpreter, and managed the establishment to the satisfaction of all.

We shall relate, in a future chapter, the trials and progress of the Society in England. But we must first

follow Madame d'Houet into a new country where that same year she also made a foundation.

God directed her footsteps to the town of Annecy in Savoy, at that period included in the kingdom of Sardinia. Madame d'Houet rejoiced at the thought of sowing the good seed in a town once sanctified by the presence of St. Francis de Sales and her early success there led her to hope for happy results.

The Bishop of Annecy, Monseigneur Thiollaz, received her overtures very favourably while permitting her to open schools for young girls, and was kind enough to lodge the Sisters for a short time in a house which he owned. At the very outset a free school, a boarding-school and a day-school were organized. Every one seemed so satisfied with the work that Madame d'Houet thought of procuring a more spacious dwelling. Whilst matters were pending the Bishop died. Even before he reached his episcopal city certain unknown persons had prejudiced his successor against the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. More than this, accusations without the least semblance of truth were circulated and even reached the ears of the king, Charles Albert. The saintly Foundress, whose only politics were those concerned with the Eternal Kingdom, was represented as an intriguing woman who professed opinions subversive to authority and order. In short her enemies were so successful that the house at Annecy, after a brief existence of one year, was blotted out by a royal decree issued from Turin and the Society banned in the Sardinian States. Every one at Annecy was astonished and distressed at the sad news, as we learn from a letter written by the Abbé Tissot, Canon of Annecy, dated October 20, 1831. Every attempt to vindicate Madame d'Houet's conduct, even that made by the town author-

ities, proving fruitless, she, as we learn from the testimony of Abbé Tissot, confessor of the community, accepted this heavy cross with her habitual serenity and submissiveness. Our Lord compensated her for the failure of this undertaking by the foundation of a convent at Carouge on the Lake of Geneva.

"As I was forced to give up Annecy," says the holy Foundress, "several of our friends advised us to open a house in the neighbourhood. One lady, who wished to place her daughters with us, suggested Carouge which is close to Geneva. I consulted M. Burdalot, a lawyer, a thoroughly reliable man. When I suggested Carouge, he replied: 'Yes; that will do nicely, for we can easily send our children to you there'. M. Tissot, our confessor, and M. Picolet, a saintly priest of our acquaintance, living at Annecy, were of the same opinion. As M. Tissot was about to start for Evian, he promised to talk the matter over with the parish priest of Carouge, who was a special friend of his. A few days later, I received a letter from him in which he said that the parish priest was of opinion that a foundation was out of the question, though personally he favoured the project. M. Picolet was very vexed and at once went to Carouge to see to our interests. I then thought of going to Lausanne, knowing that the parish priest there was friendly, for he had already suggested my making a foundation. However, I gave the preference to Carouge, as it was closer to Annecy. I settled with M. Picolet to leave for Lausanne the day after his departure, and arranged to book only as far as Carouge, where he would let me know by note if I were to halt or continue my journey. The letter was duly delivered and contained only these words: 'Alas! it is not possible'. I therefore continued my journey to Lausanne. The parish priest received

me very kindly, and it was settled that our Sisters were to start at once for the new foundation. It occurred to me afterwards that the people of Lausanne, hearing that we had been expelled from Annecy, might resent our coming to their town, and that the authorities might be suspicious and difficult to deal with. The parish priest shared my fears, so we finally agreed to postpone the matter, and I started for Annecy to take our Sisters back to France. I reached Geneva about three in the afternoon and at once engaged and prepaid our places in the diligence for the next morning, but had scarcely left the office when I felt a strong impulse to call on the parish priest of Carouge and myself to urge the founding of a house there. I put away the idea as foolish, for I had already been formally told that such a thing was not feasible; still, the thought pursued me with such persistence that I found myself standing still to dwell upon it in the streets. I told my companion, Sister Anne, but she was quite as perplexed as I was. We placed ourselves in the presence of God and invoked the Holy Spirit with fervour and earnestness. I then talked matters over with Sister Anne, explained the pros and cons, and said: 'I have no one to decide for me, so I consult you in the spirit of faith. Tell me frankly what you think.' She replied: 'It is perfectly clear that Monsieur le Curé, who must already have been surprised at your second request, will be still more so at a third. I foresee nothing but humiliation for you and the Society; nevertheless, on the other hand, if it is God's will, it would be a mistake not to follow his inspiration. Even though there be only humiliation in store for us, is not this the lot of religious souls?' We therefore set out for Carouge at once, though all the time I felt very loath to make any proposal to the good priest and could

only beg Our Lord to help us. I told Him I only wanted our project to succeed in so far as it was in accordance with His Divine will. The parish priest opened the door himself. As he did not know us I had to introduce myself and explain the object of my visit, though I did not state the motive (fear of not doing God's will) which had really induced me to renew my request. He told me that he thought the foundation I proposed quite impossible, though he personally regretted its being so. 'However,' he added, 'if you think it is God's will, I advise you to attempt it. I consent to your making the foundation.' 'If you think we can promote God's glory in this country,' I replied, 'it will be my dearest wish to do so.' I then asked him to give me advice and directions. He told me that the first step to take was to go to the town-hall of Geneva and ask to settle at Carouge. I was to state that I had a large family and friends staying with me. We went that evening to the booking office at Geneva whence we had procured the diligence tickets and asked to return them. We said that we had decided to travel another day. Remarking sarcastically that we did not seem to know our own minds, and that we had been in too great a hurry to part with our money, the clerk refused to refund the fares. Next morning we went to the town-hall, where the magistrates received us courteously and examined my pass-port. I asked permission to settle at Carouge, and they gave a ready consent. I told them that I wished in every way to conform to the laws of the country, and informed them, as the parish priest had advised me, that I had a large family and friends who made their home with me. They raised no objections, and gave me all necessary permissions, assuring me of the protection of the authorities. When I returned to

the parish priest, he congratulated me on my success and thought that what had occurred was a sign of God's will. He then told me that he had informed M. Fontana, the Bishop's Chancellor, who happened to be staying with him, and led us to the room where this ecclesiastic was sitting. He at once showed interest in our plans and assured me of the Bishop's approval. Both these priests were so anxious that we should immediately take the preliminary steps in the matter, that they sent me to visit a Protestant clergyman's residence which was to let. He received me most civilly, taking me, I think, for one of the Carlist faction in France. We all but came to terms at the first interview. However, I asked him to let the matter stand over for a few days, which he promised to do. The priests had no further hesitation in recognising God's will, and M. Fontana advised me to go to Fribourg without delay to consult the Bishop and obtain his consent. The parish priest promised to interview the mayor and other civic authorities for me. The Bishop showed us very fatherly kindness. I thought it well to tell him of the disagreeable transactions that had necessitated our leaving Annecy. He told me to reassure myself, for that he knew more about it all than I did and, moreover, was quite convinced that we had been in no way to blame. We presented our rules to him. He was satisfied with everything, and at once gave us permission to have Holy Mass, the Blessed Sacrament reserved, and all the privileges we enjoyed in France. I delayed a day or two on my way back to Carouge, and found that these canonical authorizations were already there awaiting me.

"I returned to the minister's house still wearing a secular dress. He and his wife were absent but their daughter and son-in-law completed the transaction.

They invited me to stay to lunch as their father was expected and he had to affix his signature to the lease. I excused myself on the plea that I was waited for elsewhere, which was true, as Sister Anne awaited me at our modest lodging, but they would take no refusal for tea that evening, so, fearing to offend them, I promised to come if possible. I had no choice, for the parish priest obliged me to go. We concluded the arrangements to our mutual satisfaction, and they promised that the house should be ready for us in a week's time. I then transacted some other business in the town. A day or two after, as I was calling on the parish priest before leaving for Annecy, M. Tissot, who had just returned from Evian, entered quickly. He was surprised to see me and said: 'Well what are you doing here? Did you not receive my letter?' I answered with a smile: 'Yes, I did receive your note, but for the last week God has done wonders for us. The foundation here is almost made; the Bishop has given his approbation to our rule of life and granted all permissions; the secular authorities are satisfied; and I have rented a house. I am going to fetch Sisters in order to begin the work at once.' He was astonished and, indeed, I used myself often to wonder whether it was not all a dream.

"After taking over the house, I returned to the town-hall of Geneva. The same gentlemen received me and renewed their promise of protection, indeed they appeared to take it as rather a compliment that I had chosen to settle in their canton.

"At the time agreed upon, I returned to Carouge with our Sisters. As we arrived at nightfall, we went to an inn. We had sent on our luggage, which might arrive at any moment; so next morning I at once went to the minister's house, and found to my joy that he and

his wife had already gone away leaving the gardeners in charge. These good people were most obsequious in their attentions, for they had heard the minister say that I was a very rich lady, and they thought their fortune made. They had prepared everything with the utmost care for the reception of the attendants and equipages of 'Madame'! One of our Sisters presently came to inform me that, as I had arranged beforehand, our luggage was on the point of arriving. I took the opportunity of sending the gardener and his wife on some messages which would detain them until we had disposed of our belongings. Just as they left, the vans carrying our furniture arrived. They were unloaded quickly and everything stowed out of sight. The benches and school-desks would have at once betrayed us. The gardener and his wife returned just as we had finished unpacking and, needless to remark, the style of our furniture and our Sisters soon brought their civilities to an end. A few days later they left.

"In the meantime rumour was rife. The Protestants blamed their clergyman for having rented his house to nuns and thus facilitated their entrance into the country. He, poor man, was quite as much put out as they were, but the civil authorities, who were Catholics, were pleased. They wrote to the syndicate at Annecy about us, and had a satisfactory and detailed reply, in which the members of the Council there expressed regret at our having left their town. This letter had a good effect all round. The Civic Council of Geneva, to everybody's surprise, at once authorized us to teach. We took possession of the house early in November and immediately afterwards the parish priest blessed the chapel, a large room formerly used by the minister for his study. On the occasion of this simple ceremony we

sang with hearts full of gratitude and thanksgiving the beautiful hymn :—

> Quoique caché dans ce mystère
> Sous les apparences du pain,
> C'est notre Dieu, c'est notre Père,
> C'est le Sauveur du genre humain.

A boarding-school was opened forthwith. Seven little girls came from Annecy, and, by the beginning of spring, we had twenty-five pupils. The house was so small that we were soon cramped for space, but God again came to our help. We heard that a disused factory was for sale, and tried to get it, but some one else outbid us. Fortunately the new owner, when he came to make arrangements to place his daughter with us, formally proposed to re-sell to us, upon which I hastened to have the conveyance drawn up. We arranged that, should any difficulty arise as to our owning the property, I would make the purchase in another name. I applied to the Corporation of Geneva, which after a month's delay accorded me the desired permission. We at once made all necessary alterations, and this establishment became one of the finest and most flourishing of our convents. It was an educational centre for Catholic girls of the surrounding country and prevented their attending Protestant schools, as hitherto they had been constrained to do."

In order to withdraw as great a number of young girls as possible from Protestant influence, the Foundress, besides this first-class boarding-school, established another for children of the middle class. The two departments were completely separated. The second school increased beyond all expectation, so that for want of accommodation she was obliged to close the former. Nor was she unmindful of the poor of Carouge, but for their benefit opened a poor school. Later on, to prevent children from coming under a non-Catholic influence, whilst learning a trade, she opened an Industrial School. These

two works—the poor school and the industrial school—which were productive of much good, awakened the suspicions and mistrust of some persons in authority. In order, therefore, not to compromise the existence of the establishment, she had to discontinue both. This house of the Society in Switzerland has had an eventful career. As an outcome of religious persecution, the nuns had to leave Carouge in 1869. They then settled in Veyrier, Haute Savoie, whence the French Government dislodged them some few years ago. A third migration led them back to Switzerland, to the University city of Fribourg. The number of pupils at Carouge rose to 150 and they came from all parts of Europe and from distant countries. In the canton of Geneva, mission-work, properly so-called, was not carried out by the Faithful Companions of Jesus on the same scale as in England; still Our Lord made them instrumental of much good in this land frozen by the breath of heresy. In 1868, a beautiful Church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was solemnly consecrated by Monseigneur Mermillod, Bishop of Hebron, then Auxiliary-Bishop of Geneva, and stands as a monument of the zeal and devotion of the good Sisters.

In December, 1832, the year of the foundation of Carouge, Madame d'Houet opened another convent in Switzerland, at Estavayer, in the canton of Fribourg. It was destined to be short-lived, for, at the end of four years, difficulties arose which obliged her to close it.

In June, 1836, Madame d'Houet founded a convent in France in the old historic town of Bourges. The property she purchased had, prior to the French Revolution, belonged to another religious congregation, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin.

During these years, acting on advice, the holy woman took steps to disprove the false accusations raised against the Society at Annecy. It seemed but common prudence to clear up so serious a misunderstanding, as it might check the good she hoped to do. Providence raised up for her influential defenders in the capital city of Turin, foremost among whom was the

Marquis of Azeglio, Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber. Thanks to his influence, exact information was sought and obtained by the Sardinian Government, with the result that the accusations were proved to be unfounded and untrue. We learn the details of a matter so painful yet so consoling from the Marquis of Azeglio's letters which are kept in the archives of the Society. The King, to whom Madame d'Houet had addressed a petition in her own justification, expressed his regret for the injustice he had involuntarily connived at, and, as some compensation, gave his full consent to the establishment of the Society in his States and particularly in Turin.

The Marquis of Azeglio had already proposed that Madame d'Houet should take charge of a reformatory which he was about to open in Turin. He had given her to understand that his resources would not permit him to pay a salary to the mistresses, nor even to defray their travelling expenses. Indeed, all that he could offer was a house with five small rooms and a kitchen, which he guaranteed to furnish and to let them have rent free. Madame d'Houet accepted these conditions and received soon after a letter from the Minister of the Interior officially authorizing the new foundation. The Archbishop of Turin cordially gave his permission and welcome. Towards the middle of January, 1836, the Foundress, with one Sister, reached Turin. Taking possession of the humble dwelling she began, from the very first day, to teach the little orphan girls, filling at the same time, until the other members of the community arrived, the double rôle of portress and cook. No obstacle could humanly speaking be foreseen, everything promised a prosperous and happy issue; yet one day, as the Foundress was praying before the most-holy

Sacrament, an interior voice made itself heard, and she distinctly caught the words: "Do not fear, I myself will preserve this house". She was astounded but failed to understand either the meaning or the reason of the warning. However, on the following day, troubles began, threatening the very existence of the establishment. The Marquis considered that he possessed not only the rights and the title of founder of the reformatory which he called "his school," but asserted his claim to direct and control it, meddling in matters regarding the instruction given, the discipline, and the staff. It was obvious that Madame d'Houet could not tolerate an interference which gave to her religious, for Superior, one who was not a member of the Society. She made every possible concession that her conscience allowed, and always couched, in humble and grateful words, the polite and deferential refusals which she felt bound to make. At last, however, nothing remained but to make a firm stand against his ill-judged interference. This unpleasant state of things lasted for about a year, and ended by the Marquis transferring the charge and direction of his reformatory to secular hands. A few years later he asked the Faithful Companions of Jesus again to undertake this work. Madame d'Houet gave him his reply through the local superior at Turin whom she directed first to consult a certain ecclesiastic on whose judgment she relied. If he thought well of the offer, she would accept it, but only on the clear understanding that the school was to be under the sole direction of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and not to be subject to outside interference. The matter went no farther. This good priest, the Abbé Fantini, who was the parish priest of the Annunciata at Turin, had been most helpful to Madame d'Houet while this difficult and delicate position

lasted. One day, when he was urging her not to displease the Marquis and begging her to agree as far as possible to his terms, she replied quietly: "Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, but you will have to show me how to please the Marquis without displeasing God".

From the time of the arrival of the religious at Turin there had been a question of establishing a boarding-school for poor girls, at the rate of twelve francs a month. The Marquis of Azeglio had pressed Madame d'Houet to begin this work in April, 1836, and the Abbé Fantini also urged her to undertake it. With this in view, he advised her to rent a more spacious house than the small building provided by the Marquis. "At any cost," he writes, "you must rent a house, or land to build one on. What can you do in so small a place with such a number of persons? Besides it is unsuitable for nuns." Madame d'Houet began to look out for a more spacious house, and, after a protracted delay, leased a country seat, known as the "Grey Vineyard". The boarding-school commenced with three pupils, placed there by the Queen, and soon became a flourishing educational centre. Originally the foundation at Turin was destined for the industrial class, but soon the status of the pupils altered, and only those of a superior social position were received there. Later on, the necessity of meeting more modern requirements arose, and the terms were gradually raised, but the education continued to be simple and solid and, for some time, no accomplishments were taught. The King, Charles Albert, honoured the establishment with his special patronage, and during his lifetime aided it handsomely by an annual endowment. This second house, however, had also its drawbacks and, after a few years, Madame d'Houet purchased one more suitable in every

Photo: Stackemann & Co., Teddington

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, LARK HILL HOUSE, PRESTON

Founded 1861

[*See p.* 360]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, ST. MARY'S CONVENT, NEWTOWNBARRY, CO. WEXFORD

Founded 1862

[*See p.* 360]

way. Before entering into negotiations about it, she prayed and begged for prayers. "Recommend," she wrote on April 29, 1844, "the question concerning this house at Turin to God and to His Blessed Mother, our dear and holy Superior." Indeed, to our Blessed Lady she wholly entrusted the choice of a new house, as we learn from a letter found after her death, beneath a statue of Mary. In this letter, while she speaks of selecting a house she, at the same time, tells Our Lady that this foundation and all those of the Society belong to her, and begs of her to remind her Divine Son that He had Himself specially promised to protect this one at Turin. The twofold petition was answered for, at the end of 1844, she was able to secure an entirely satisfactory property. In all subsequent trials Our Lord has, up to the year when this work was written, wonderfully protected the house of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Turin. In brighter days for Religion the boarding-school there has had over two hundred pupils, and in spite of the sad times in which we live, they now number about one hunded and sixty.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME D'HOUET'S SECOND VISIT TO ROME. APPROBATION OF THE SOCIETY BY THE THEN REIGNING PONTIFF, GREGORY XVI.

1837.

We have already seen that in 1826, on the occasion of her first visit to Rome, several highly influential persons promised Madame d'Houet to watch over the interests of her Society. Their good will and interest, however, produced no special results nor, for the time being, did she urge her suit for the approval of her Society. For important reasons she held herself passive, mainly on account of the violent opposition she met with on her return to France. She begged, therefore, those interested in her not to press the matter, and proposed to go to Rome herself, at a more propitious time, to submit the necessary explanations to those in authority. According to her custom, she did not hurry about this. She attached the greatest importance to her Society's having the approval of the Holy See, the "Great Approbation," as she so often calls it in her memoirs. But she feared lest, by over-eagerness, she might interfere with the designs of God, her only wish being to conform herself most faithfully and most perfectly to His holy will. She waited, therefore, eleven years, in prayer and in patience, for the hour fixed by Him. This time, too, the signal was given by the venerable Bishop of Amiens, Mgr. de Châbons. A circumstance, in itself of

small importance, created the occasion. A priest from Florence wrote to Madame d'Houet about some young girls who wished to enter religion. She spoke of the matter to the Bishop of Amiens, who advised her to see them herself and examine their vocations, and to make use of her journey to Italy to consult Archbishop Mancini of Siena, who was always a staunch friend of her and of her Society. The Bishop said: "Ask him if he thinks the time favourable for your obtaining the Approbation of your Society, and look upon his decision as the expression of God's will". "The Bishop," she writes in her memoirs, "in speaking about the subject, said: 'You will obtain this Approbation, it may be by natural means, or it may be by supernatural means, but you will get it all the same. God has not shown me in what manner His will is to be accomplished'."

In the spring of the year 1837, the Foundress set out for Italy. Several reasons, amongst others an illness at the end of Lent, detained her in Turin longer than she had anticipated. Under the impression that she would go no farther than Siena, she had taken with her for companion a Sister who had no knowledge of Italian. But when she reached Siena the Archbishop decided that she was to go on to Rome, for he thought the time was favourable, as Monsignor Soglia, who, since 1826, had kept up his interest in the Society, was now Secretary of the Sacred Congregation. After this decision Madame d'Houet wrote to the Bishops in whose dioceses she had convents, and begged them to give her letters to the Holy Father. She received most kind and cordial replies. She then sent for Mother Josephine Petit who understood and wrote Italian fairly well, and her former companion returned to France with the Italian postulants. All this delayed her at Siena

for about a month; the Archbishop, as on the former occasion, lodged her in a suite of rooms in his own palace. She passed this period of inactivity in retreat, and during her spiritual exercises was assailed by violent fears. Let us again listen to her own words.

"It seemed to me that the powers of evil were leagued against me and were trying, by every means, to prevent this journey to Rome. The thought of going there filled me with such grave anxiety that I was at a loss to account for it. It appeared to me that the most overwhelming calamities awaited us there. I told this to Sister Anne, who tried to calm me by recalling to my mind the paternal protection God unfailingly accorded to our little Society. 'Do you think,' she said, 'that He will abandon us at the most important moment of all?' I also opened my mind to the Archbishop of Siena, who bade me dismiss thoughts which tended only to disturb and to go forward with confidence and in the spirit of faith. Chance placed in my hands a booklet containing an account of the origin and tenets of the different sects which had revolted against the Church. I was alarmed; I thought that without God's grace perhaps we too might have the misfortune to fall into error. This idea haunted me persistently during the whole time we spent in Rome, so much so that Mother Josephine and I took a firm resolution to banish from our minds the thought that the Pope or Church could possibly make a mistake, or act injustly, or be prejudiced against us."

The venerable Foundress and her companion reached Rome, May 21, 1837. They at once offered their homage and supplications at the feet of Our Lady and at the Tombs of the Apostles. The next day, the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, they passed in prayer,

and then took the first necessary steps to gain their intent.

"On Monday," she writes, "we prepared our papers, and at 5 p.m. we presented ourselves at the palace of Cardinal Sala, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation. We had some difficulty in prevailing upon the attendants to announce our arrival. We had left the antechamber when some one, more kindly disposed than the others, took compassion on us and obtained our admission. The Cardinal received us with the greatest affability, and said that he had been expecting us, as the Bishop of Asti had announced to him by letter our early arrival in Rome. He showed deep interest in our case, appeared most sanguine that we should obtain the Approbation, and promised to use his best efforts to expedite matters. The next day we went to the Secretariate of the Sacred Congregation to present our respects to Monsignor Soglia. He had been informed of our arrival by Cardinal Sala. On the Feast of Corpus Christi we had the happiness of seeing the Holy Father after the procession, as he was returning to his palace, and we saw him a second time and much closer on the Feast of St. Philip Neri at the church dedicated to that Saint. He heard Mass at his throne, and we were sufficiently near to see him plainly. His perfect recollectedness and evident devotion impressed us deeply."

To these favourable beginnings the sequel did not correspond. Soon the venerable Foundress met with opposition, all the more powerful because it came from those who owed their position to their virtue and to their talents. From that moment every door was closed against her. She and her companion were described, by one who had in the first instance shown them con-

sideration and favour, as restless and scheming personages, or otherwise disparagingly. The Prelates even who had seemed the most benevolently disposed towards the Society, when Madame d'Houet consulted them, received her with marked coldness and indifference. "It will only be the Almighty power of God," they said to her, "which can obtain for you the Approbation of your Society, for the question has aroused the animosity and opposition of most powerful people." Those who still had her interest at heart did not dare have their names mentioned in connection with hers and insisted on their relations with her remaining secret. It is true that Cardinal Castracane, whose acquaintance she had made in a providential manner, still showed her sympathy and interest and was always willing to help her by his advice and his prayers ; indeed, when she remained a little time without calling on him, he used to send for her. Yet even he wished that his friendly intercourse should be kept as private as possible. While matters were in this unpleasant and critical position Madame d'Houet, after consulting God in earnest prayer, and acting on the advice of one holding a high position in the Church, begged for the suspending of her business and the withdrawal of her papers. Yet even this was not easily managed. It required all the energy and force of her strong will to effect it. On this occasion the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Monsignor Soglia, whom she always consulted, requested the two religious not to come again to his office, though he protested that personally he was their friend. Assuring them of his unchanged sympathy, he insisted that, as he could no longer be of use to them, their visits would only injure their cause. At the suggestion of both Cardinal Castracane and of Monsignor Soglia, Madame

d'Houet, as a last resource, solicited an audience with the Holy Father. After she had waited patiently for a fortnight, the person who had undertaken to urge her suit told her in blunt terms that he had obtained audiences for all others on behalf of whom he had solicited them but that she must give up all hope. He added: "The Holy Father refuses to see you, and he is exceedingly displeased. Your only safe course at present is to leave Rome immediately; otherwise, I warn you, great misfortunes may befall you." Alas! it seemed only too clear that no other course did lie open. Madame d'Houet, therefore, made up her mind to quit the Eternal City, and would have carried out her intention without further delay, had not her companion fallen seriously ill at this critical moment. Alarmed at what might happen if the Foundress remained in Rome, Mother Josephine begged to be left behind. As we can well understand, the kind and loving Superior would not hear of this. We may easily conceive how painfully this new cross weighed on the shoulders of both one and the other; yet this apparent misfortune was permitted by the "Good Master" in order to raise them from the depths of sadness and abandonment to the heights of joy and thanksgiving. For them, Calvary came before Thabor!

Several days passed, the state of the invalid continuing such as to render an immediate departure impossible. While they waited in prayer and patience, though they knew it not, God's hour came. One morning, at nine o'clock, a priest, a stranger to Madame d'Houet, called at the house and asked to see her. The announcement alarmed her. She was, however, immediately reassured by these comforting words: "I am a stranger to you, Madame, but I have come on

the part of the Holy Father. His Holiness wishes to see you this evening at six o'clock in his palace. Be without anxiety, the Pope is most kindly disposed towards you. He knows that one of you speaks Italian and he is pleased at this." "I told the priest that I should have to go alone," says Madame d'Houet in her memoirs, "as my companion, who spoke Italian, was very ill and confined to her bed. He said that he would inform the Pope and bring me back his reply, for His Holiness wished positively to see us without an interpreter. Some hours later he returned and told me in the Pope's name that I might postpone the audience until my companion was better, when I was to inform Monsignor Soglia, so that he might arrange a convenient day and hour to conduct us to the palace.

"Some days later, or perhaps the very next day, the Under-Secretary of State, who had all through been friendly, called, and said, as he entered the room: 'I bring you news that will astound you'. When I asked if it were good or bad, he answered: 'If it were bad, I would not bring it with such joy. For the last four months, while you have been soliciting favours, you have obtained none; now, that you have withdrawn your suit, everything has been granted to you and in the most consoling and satisfactory manner. The Sovereign Pontiff has informed the Sacred Congregation that he approves of your Institute and that he wishes you to keep your name. And of course the Sacred Congregation, moved by the resolution of His Holiness, officially accords you the favour without denial. I am commissioned to show you the rough draft of the Approbation.' The Under-Secretary spoke most hopefully of our case. He said that the Approbation was granted under the most advantageous

conditions. He explained that as a rule the Sacred Congregation examines the Rule and Constitutions of an Institute and, when it approves of them, submits its judgment to the Pope who, relying on the report made to him, sanctions the giving of the Approbation. The Under-Secretary remarked that he had been occupied for years in the bureau of the Sacred Congregation, but that a case parallel to ours had never come before him. In consequence of this change in our position, Cardinal Castracane and Monsignor Soglia renewed their friendly relations with us; and the latter allowed us to come to the bureau of the Sacred Congregation, as heretofore. Cardinal Sala showed us much kindness and courtesy, especially in the form and wording of the Approbation. The Under-Secretary remarked that I seemed a little disappointed in the draft which he had shown me. The Cardinal said that he was not surprised, because the Brief given by Leo XII was so beautiful and so affectionate, that it was impossible to say more. He determined, therefore, to insert this Brief of Praise in the Decree of Approbation—which, as a matter of fact, was done."

What could have caused so sudden and complete a change, which, humanly speaking, seemed beyond the range of possibility? To answer this question satisfactorily, we must retrace our steps.

One day at the beginning of Madame d'Houet's stay in Rome, after she had received Holy Communion in the church of St. Philip Neri, on his feast, she heard an interior voice which said: "Draw up a memorial for presentation to the Holy Father. I myself will place it in his hands." Madame d'Houet, who never of her own accord shaped her conduct by such interior illuminations, for she feared illusions, consulted Monsignor

Soglia on the point, without telling him the motive which actuated her proposal. He told her candidly that such a step would be useless and to abandon the idea. She did so. However, a few days later, in a letter which she received from the Archbishop of Siena, much to her surprise, the same suggestion occurred. He wrote: "Draw up a petition and send it direct to the Pope". Moreover, almost simultaneously, Cardinal Castracane gave her similar advice. She told his Eminence, when he made the suggestion, that such also was the counsel of her director, the Archbishop of Siena, but that Monsignor Soglia had told her that the doing so would be useless. Cardinal Castracane advised her to seek an opportunity of mentioning the matter again to Monsignor Soglia, but to assure him at the same time, that if he still thought the attempt inopportune, she would not make it. This time Monsignor Soglia seconded the idea, and even had the kindness to revise the memorial. Nor was this all. It was necessary that the papers should reach the hands of the Holy Father; and, in the existing state of things, who would undertake the task of presenting it? That was the difficulty. Prelates who had half promised to do her the service required, one after the other declined, fearing to compromise themselves. She made fresh attempts, and once even had reason to believe that her petition was actually in the Sovereign Pontiff's possession; but again, when her difficulties were at their height, she learned that it had not yet reached him. She made her last move, and received a promise from one in whom she had every confidence that the Holy Father should see her memorial; but it would appear that he too failed her. One evening, when Monsignor Soglia was coming out from an audience with the

Sovereign Pontiff, an unknown person thrust some manuscripts into his hands, without a word of explanation. When he reached home he found, to his surprise, that it was Madame d'Houet's memorial. He turned to the Under-Secretary and said: "There is really something extraordinary about this paper. Put it under cover and direct it to the Holy Father. Mark on the outside that it is a private communication to be opened only by him." He who had, on the feast of St. Philip Neri, said to His Faithful Companion: "I myself will place it in the hands of the Holy Father," without doubt kept His promise, and moreover lent to the simple words of that petition a supernatural power that availed to the producing of the fortunate and happy result which ensued.

Two or three days before the audience, Madame d'Houet and her companion had an unexpected consolation, that of visiting Cardinal Odescalchi, then Cardinal-Vicar of Rome, who was universally looked upon as a saint.[1] They had hoped to obtain an audience, but had not dared to ask for it. What, then, was their astonishment to receive a note from his Eminence asking them to call at his palace next morning at eight! The holy Cardinal welcomed them with the greatest cordiality and told them that he wished to make their acquaintance, as he took a great interest in the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus which he was persuaded was God's own work. He bade them approach the Sovereign Pontiff without fear: "I can assure you," he remarked, "that you have completely won the heart

[1] It may be interesting to state here that the very next year Cardinal Odescalchi, who belonged to the illustrious family which had given Innocent XI to the Church, laid aside the scarlet robes of Cardinal for the simple soutane of a Jesuit novice.

of the Holy Father. I was present during a discussion between the Pope and a person of rank who is avowedly opposed to you, one who generally is all-powerful with his Holiness ; but he did not succeed in this case, for the sympathy and affection which the Pope bears your Society were proof against all his arguments and opposition."

At last the day fixed for the audience with the Holy Father arrived. Let us again allow Madame d'Houet to speak.

" We went, as we had been instructed, to the gardens of the palace, and were taken to a small building which stood in the centre of them. Monsignor Soglia met us there, and conducted us into the Holy Father's presence. What we felt can never be described. The Pope approached us and we prostrated ourselves at his feet, which he allowed us to kiss. Then Monsignor Soglia bade us rise, but I replied that we were very comfortable in that kneeling position. The Pope laughed and said : ' Is that so ? But I order you to rise and sit down at once.' We did so without hesitation, and then he motioned to Monsignor Soglia to sit down too, saying most kindly : ' Now we are going to talk over matters at our ease '. He seemed like a good father surrounded by loving children. He asked me if the dress we were wearing was our religious habit, and on my answering affirmatively, he expressed approval, and then said : ' I know all the good you have been doing. God will bless you '. He then took the book of our Common Rules, which I held in my hand, glanced over them, and remarked : ' This refers to the interior government of your houses. I see no reason why they should not be approved.' Whereupon he returned them to Monsignor Soglia for that purpose. He asked how

His Holiness Gregory XVI, Pope 1831-46

Who granted the Church's approbation to the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, August 5, 1837

many houses we had, looked at the account of them which I presented to him, and said smilingly to Monsignor Soglia : 'And so, Monsignore, these are the missionary women ! ' At these words, Madame d'Houet tells us, she was alarmed, for she recognized that he was alluding to a certain memorial penned by the hand of the bitterest of all her enemies and which contained the most cutting and humiliating allusions to the Society. This memorial, she knew, had reached the Pope, and she seized the opportunity of giving some explanation. Gregory XVI replied benignly : 'Be at rest on that matter. I know all about it ; besides I admire and think very highly of missionary women'. Then, assuming a more serious tone, he said : 'Believe me, whatever you undertake in educating the young is a true mission, and anyone occupied in training them is a real missioner. So, my dear daughters, continue your apostolic ministry,' he added with a smile. I told him that certain persons wished to cut off some of our houses from the main body of the Society. He replied : 'That is not possible. The Institute has been approved and consists of different houses under one Superior-General, as is plainly stated in the Bull of Approbation.' 'My daughters,' said the Pope, 'you have a beautiful name, but you must suffer the consequences and, as Companions of Jesus, suffer with Jesus. The Church has always been a prey to persecution and will be to the end of the world ; and yet it is the persecutions she endures that constitute her glory. So it will be with you ; but take courage. God will bless you.' I said : 'Holy Father, if efforts are made to disunite us, may I say that I heard from your lips that you forbid it ?' He reflected a moment, and then replied : 'Yes, not only *may* you say so, but I *wish* you to do so'. Then

turning to Monsignor Soglia, he said: 'They do not realize the full value of what I have granted them. In order to separate a convent from the Superior-General after the approbation of the Church, it would need a power higher even than mine.'

"Before we left his presence, he again blessed us and repeated: 'I bless the Superior-General and all the Society'. He then dismissed us and begged us to pray for him."

After a final visit to Cardinals Sala and Castracane, the venerable Foundress and her companion left Rome on August 16. It was none too soon, for the cholera had begun its ravages, and their conveyance was one of the last which was allowed to leave Rome. On their return journey they again experienced God's marked protection, and attributed it to the intercession of St. Philomena. We again turn to Madame d'Houet's memoirs.

"Three carriages were to leave that day for the same place. Ours, which was one of the number, was advertized to start last. We had given the parish priest a little furniture we had purchased while at Rome, to bestow on the first poor woman who had a daughter, on condition that she called the child 'Philomena'. This priest sent for the furniture before we left, and as evening was approaching, we feared that if the diligence did not start, we should be without necessaries for the night. A friend of ours prevailed upon our driver to start at once, so that our carriage left second instead of third. A gang of brigands, who found out when the three diligences were to leave, planned to attack the third, which as a matter of fact they did. They pillaged and ill-treated the travellers, and, though there were several men in the party, the banditti had the best of it.

We saw these unfortunate wayfarers arrive an hour or so after us. They gave us details of what had occurred which made us shudder, and showed how great the danger was we had escaped, thanks to the protection of God and the intercession of St. Philomena."

After four days' travelling the two religious arrived at Perugia, where they were detained in quarantine. The Bishop showed them much kindness. He lodged them in a convent where they passed their days in retreat and prayer, and received but one visitor, the Bishop himself, who came to be reassured that they were comfortable and in want of nothing. The cholera obliged them to make a long round—and having passed by Siena, Florence, Bologna, and Piacenza, they reached Turin, where they once more had the happiness of being in a house of the Society and in the midst of their beloved Sisters in religion.

For the satisfaction of the friends of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and for the edification of the general reader, we insert the translation of the Decree of Approbation granted to the Society by Pope Gregory XVI.

The document is dated August 5, 1837.

"In the year 1820 some devout women taking the name of Faithful Companions of Jesus began, at Amiens in France, a pious Society devoted entirely to the education of young girls and especially to that of children born of poor parents. The undertaking having, under God, prospered, and four houses having been established, Marie Madeleine d'Houet, who was the originator of the said Society, went to Rome for the purpose of humbly beseeching the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XII, to confirm

by his apostolic authority this Institute, its Rules, and Constitutions.

"Not only did the Sovereign Pontiff welcome her kindly and declare that he deemed such a Society one to be highly approved of, since there was every reason to hope that it would be the greatest use to both Church and to the state, but, by a letter addressed to the Bishop of Amiens, he strongly recommended this prelate and the other Bishops of France to help the said Society and to take it under their special and marked protection, for he considered that Sisters who devoted themselves so zealously to the education of Christian youth were most worthy of favour. The Holy Father, however, deferred until a later date his formal approbation of the Rules and Constitutions of the said Society, in order that a careful examination of them might be made, their approval being of such grave importance. The matter was then put off until the sixth day of April of the year 1837. On which day, in the general assembly of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and of Regulars, the Most-Eminent Fathers having carefully considered the question in detail, decreed that the Institute was worthy of praise. On the thirteenth day of the same month this decision of the Sacred Congregation having been reported to Our Most Holy Lord, Pope Gregory XVI, His Holiness commanded the Bishop of Amiens, letter of recommendation of the Institute to be brought to him. Whereupon the aforesaid Madeleine d'Houet presented to the Holy Father a letter of the Bishop of Amiens dated the eleventh of May, 1837, in which this prelate very plainly sets forth that the Institute produces great fruits of salvation among Christians in general and among the female sex in particular, and therefore solicits the approbation of the Apostolic See

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus,
St. Monica's Convent, Skipton-in-Craven, Yorks
Founded 1865

[*See p.* 360]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus,
St. Mary's Convent, The Newlands, Middlesbrough, Yorks
Founded 1872

[*See p.* 360]

for the Institute. The aforesaid Madame d'Houet has also brought letters of recommendation from the Archbishops of Turin and Siena, the Bishops of Nantes, Langres, Lausanne, and Geneva, and from the Bishop of Olena, Vicar-Apostolic of the London District, all which letters fully support the testimony given by the Bishop of Amiens. For this reason His Holiness, in view of documents bearing so favourable witness to the new Society, after hearing the opinion of some of the Most-Eminent Fathers of the same Sacred Congregation, has ordered to be prepared a Brief of Praise and a Decree of Approbation of the said Institute, ordaining that they be delivered by Apostolic Letters in the form of Brief. In this Brief of Approbation His Holiness nevertheless does not include the Rules and Constitutions, on which judgment will be passed later. His Holiness thus ordained in an audience granted to the under-signed Secretary on this fourth day of August, 1837.

"In consequence of the decision of the Pope, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, in virtue of special faculties accorded to it, praises and approves of the Institute of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and ordains that this decree of Praise and Approbation be embodied in Apostolic Letters in the form of Brief, reserving judgment on the Rules and Constitutions of the said Institute to a later date.

"Given at Rome from the Office of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

"This fifth day of August, 1837.

"J. A. Cardinal Sala, *Prefect.*

"J. Patriarch of Constantinople, *Secretary.*"

CHAPTER XIV.

TRIALS. FOUNDATIONS IN IRELAND. JOURNEYS OF MADAME D'HOUET.

1837-1847.

The wonderful results of the voyage to Rome, reached as we have seen at cost of many trials and against all hope, became the occasion of other troubles scarcely less painful, on the return of the venerable Foundress to France. Her opponents succeeded in prejudicing both the Archbishop of Bourges, Monseigneur Villette, and the Bishop of Langres, Monseigneur Parisis, against her. Her closest friends, and many persons in whom she had placed great confidence, not only deserted her, but declared themselves her enemies. The sad outcome of the storm was the suppression of the three houses of Bourges, Châteauroux, and Langres, which Madame d'Houet was constrained herself to break up. Bourges (though only just founded) and Châteauroux were closed at the end of 1837, Langres a few months later.

On account of family property owned by Madame d'Houet in the province of Berry, she retained the house she had two years before purchased at Bourges, and would not yield to persuasions to sell it. She placed it under the care of an old pupil, Mademoiselle Adèle Bouque, on whose ability, tact, and straightforwardness she could rely, who, in company with several other

trustworthy persons, at that time not bound to the Society, occupied it. Later on they opened a day-school and took a few boarders, and as Mademoiselle Adèle Bouque held a government certificate they were able to continue, at least partially, the good work begun by the nuns. God had His own designs which, twenty years later, were to be accomplished. In the diocese of Bourges, and especially at Châteauroux, the Faithful Companions of Jesus were, in those sorrowful days, steeped in humiliation. Not only were they denounced as heretics and schismatics, but Holy Communion was publicly refused them. At Langres it was otherwise, for the Sisters were held in great esteem, and the spirit that reigned among them admired, and only the Superior-General was condemned.

Mother Maria Lenssens, in whose good judgment Madame d'Houet had great confidence, was sent to Langres to examine into matters with a view to rendering a full account of them to the Superior-General. In a letter of hers, dated September 29, 1837, she wrote : " I said to one of our opponents that what he stated was in itself a contradiction, for how could a community be virtuous if their Superior were the opposite of this ".

The dangers and annoyances were greater at Langres than at Châteauroux. Yet Madame d'Houet did not precipitate matters. The house at Langres had promised to be successful, and as the boarding-school was increasing, she was working for the acquisition of a more convenient and spacious property. The retreats had been especially fruitful. This last work of zeal was very dear to her heart, and she hesitated to abandon all without an obvious manifestation of God's will. Only in March, 1838, when retreats and the like were vetoed,

did she decide to close the house and withdraw from the town.

The storm was so violent that the venerable Foundress would have been justified in believing that her Society was on the eve of dissolution. At the end of October she wrote to Carouge to cancel the permission she had given to begin a new building. "I may be wrong," she wrote, "but I fear that very soon we shall no longer have need of houses. Let us pray much, but, I beg of you, do not be troubled, for God knows best what is good for us. Pray and get others to pray much. I repeat that, without a miracle, we shall not require our convents any more."[1]

Nevertheless, in the midst of all these bitter disappointments, the venerable Foundress was not without consolation. She found in prayer, in submission to God's will, and in unbounded trust in His Goodness, the strength of soul she needed to carry her heavy crosses. In every trial she showed herself calm and resigned. "Let us keep up our courage and let us pray much," she says in a letter to Langres in 1838. "You know how much I stand in need of God's help. Ask and get others to pray for my intentions. All our trust must be in the Lord who has Himself formed this Society which is all His own. He can preserve it, and I trust He will see fit to do so. Personally, I assure you, my dear daughter, I desire only the fulfilment of His will in myself and in us all." On another occasion, having alluded in a letter to the danger of the position, she added: "But, my daughter, if Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother are for us, who can do us any harm?"

[1] In spite of these sinister forebodings she was able six weeks later to write to Carouge: "The Bishop of Amiens says you may begin your building".

On 14 April, 1838, she wrote to Carouge: "Our little Society is eighteen years old to-day. I hope that the Son of God who has Himself founded it, will continue to uphold it. May His holy spirit give us the courage to carry our cross with fidelity after Him."

Madame d'Houet was also much consoled, during this critical time, by the conspicuous proofs of virtue afforded her by her spiritual daughters. In 1837 one of the Vicars-General of the diocese of Bourges, a personage greatly prejudiced against the Society and its Superior-General, was delegated to make the customary canonical visitation at the convent of Châteauroux. According to custom, he interviewed each member of the community separately. He found each one happy and contented, dissatisfied with no one but herself; but only inferred that they had been coerced by their Superior and were not speaking freely or truthfully. In as many words he accused Madame d'Houet of this, and all she could say to the contrary failed to convince him that peace and charity really reigned in the house. "Such a thing is not possible here below," he persisted, "it is only found in Heaven."[1]

[1] This visitation gave rise to a somewhat humorous incident which the venerable Mother used to recount. The "visitor" asked one of the lay Sisters, a very simple soul, if there was anything which troubled her. "Oh, yes, Father," was her reply, "there is something that distresses me very much." Here at last, he thought to himself, an important revelation is forthcoming, and so he said encouragingly to her: "Tell me, my good Sister, what it is, and I will see if I can do anything for you." She continued: "Well, Father, I have not 'Les Heures de Bourges'" (a manual of prayers used in the diocese of Bourges) "and I want one very badly". The priest thought she was jesting and dismissed her with indignation. The poor Sister, in great alarm, went to Madame d'Houet and recounted what had taken place. "It must then evidently be wrong to wish to have this book, since

We have already alluded to the humiliations to which the Faithful Companions of Jesus had to submit in the last days of their stay at Châteauroux. True daughters of one who faithfully followed in the footsteps of her Master, they too bore all their sufferings meekly and submissively, never losing that greatest of all blessings—peace of soul. When they recounted to their Superior-General the graces God had thus bestowed upon them, she was much comforted, and with a heart overflowing with gratitude thanked the "Giver of all good things" for this consolation in the midst of her great trials.

In the meantime she received very precious encouragement from Rome. "I must tell you for your consolation," she writes in January, 1838, "that I have written to Cardinal Castracane in Rome. He has spoken on my behalf to the Holy Father, who has sent me word to continue acting as I have done up to the present, for it will be all for the best. After that, my dear daughters, let us say with all our hearts: 'Courage and Confidence'. Above all, let us have great confidence in God who is Himself the Founder of our Society, and who assuredly knows and will use the means best for protecting it. Let us remember, too, that the Blessed Virgin is the Superior-General of the Society, and of each of our houses in particular."

At last, with the exception of the two Bishops already named, all the prelates with whom the Society had relations began once more to show interest and sympathy, and the three houses which had been closed were replaced by three others—Nice and Asti in the

the priest was so displeased. My mind is made up. I make the sacrifice and will think no more about it." The Superior, ever desirous of the spiritual progress of her daughters, did not undeceive the good Sister.

Sardinian States, and Menotey in the diocese of Saint-Claude, in France.

On 26 May, 1838, the Foundress gives her address as Maison Garibaldi, Rue du Lazaret, Nice, Alpes Maritimes. On June 14, in a letter written from Nice, she says: "This house may be of great utility to our Society. The town is situated between France, Italy, and Piedmont, and most distinguished persons from every country make a stay in it. The Bishop who asked us to make the foundation takes a great interest in us."

The Bishop of Saint-Claude also welcomed Madame d'Houet with much kindness, and she was received with equal benevolence by the Bishop of Asti when, in the spring of 1838, she made a foundation in his diocese. Indeed, her doing so had been in contemplation from the year before her visit to Rome. The early efforts of the Society at Asti were very toilsome, and it was only in 1842 that a boarding-school was opened, while at Nice the boarding-school prospered at once, so much so that in the first months of the year 1840, the Foundress purchased a splendid property facing the sea in one of the finest quarters of the town.

Whilst Madame d'Houet was thus engaged in foundations, Almighty God sent her a deep sorrow—the death of her devoted and constant friend and adviser—the Bishop of Amiens, who passed away on October 24, 1838. She wrote to Carouge and to all her other convents, to inform them of the loss she had sustained: "Pray and have prayers said for Monseigneur de Châbons, who has entered into the joys of a better life. You know all that we owe him."

The crosses we have outlined were not the only ones that the holy women had to bear at this period.

In England, too, there were difficulties. The establishment of the Society in that country, although brought about in a manner so wonderful, was nevertheless, during the first years of its existence, carried on in circumstances fraught with difficulties. Father Nérinckx, who had enjoyed full control of the school at Somers Town in the past, did not at first seem to realize the necessity of leaving the management of it to the local Superior, failing which it was not possible to establish the perfect observance of the rules and properly introduce the spirit of the Institute. The result was that the London foundation seemed at the very outset to be a failure. This same difficulty re-occurred again and again in the years that followed, and others came with it, so that the position became almost untenable. Unpleasantness too arose from the fact that the house and property at Somers Town did not, properly speaking, belong to the Society, the nuns being only allowed the use of it.

Another source of anxiety to the solicitous and tender heart of the Foundress was the difficulty the French sisters experienced in acclimatizing themselves in England and particularly in getting accustomed to the London fogs. For years their health suffered greatly, and more than once Madame d'Houet had serious thoughts of giving up Somers Town and recalling the Sisters to their native land. In order to procure them some relief she rented a small house at Hampstead, in those days an outlying suburb of the great metropolis, then as now noted for the salubrity of its air, and within three miles of Somers Town. During a visit which she made to England, probably in the summer of 1832, she resided at Hampstead with one of her Sisters, whither, every evening after school hours,

a party of the nuns from Somers Town came to spend the closing hours of the day and the night with her. Open fields and shady country paths then separated North-West London from Hampstead, and a pleasant walk brought them to the little house where a mother's welcome awaited them. The day ended with a frugal meal and a merry recreation, during which Madame d'Houet and her visitors improvised the sleeping arrangements. Early the next morning the guests returned to their work, making their meditation and saying their prayers as they passed through the fields and lanes still wet with the early dew. In the evening others had their turn in sharing the innocent pleasure of passing a few hours at their mother's side.

Madame d'Houet consoled and encouraged all her daughters, but Mother Julia in particular, in the trials they were going through. "Do not be discouraged," she wrote in 1835, at a very trying time; "and do not be anxious: Somers Town, like all our houses, belongs to the Blessed Virgin. Beg her most earnestly to take care of it. Ask from her this favour, through her Immaculate Conception, and by the sorrows she endured during the Passion of her Divine Son. Do not forget our holy protectors, St. Aloysius, St. Philomena, St. Joseph. St. Philomena has already obtained so many graces for the children, that we need not worry about anything that may happen. We shall remain at Somers Town as long as God wishes. Let us do all the good we can while God gives us the means."[1]

"Since peace and union reign among us, God is with us. Pray to Him earnestly, dear Mother Julia, and He will dispose all things as His infinite goodness sees fit."[2]

[1] 11 April, 1835. [2] 20 November, 1833.

"Let us then take courage, God will help us. The one really essential condition exists: that is, He is loyally served and glorified by us. I repeat; do not be over anxious. As for N., let matters stand over, for God knows more of the circumstances than she does."[1]

This last remark refers to a person not a member of the Society.

"You give me no news about your health, the state of which distresses me very much. Still I am not worrying, for I try to follow the advice which I am always giving to our Sisters—never to worry. Any trouble which we allow to *possess* our souls stays the paternal hand of God, and deprives us of many graces both for time and eternity. Oh, how comforted should I not be if I knew that my dear Sister Julia accepted all the cross-circumstances of this life without losing her peace of soul. Tell me, my dearest Sister, do we know what is best for us? I think not. And yet we are always wanting things to turn out according to our wishes. Let us love humiliations, because they alone, in God's usual Providence, lead to humility. We ought then to welcome them for ourselves, and to welcome them even for our Society as a whole."[2]

In 1832 the venerable Foundress realized that, for many reasons, it would be advantageous to have a second establishment in England. Having this in her mind, in 1835, she rented two small houses; one at Tottenham, a few miles from London, and another, to which we have already alluded, at Hampstead. The Sisters at Somers Town, and those in these two houses, were occupied in the education of children of the industrial class. Madame d'Houet now made up her

[1] 12 February, 1833. [2] 12 February, 1833.

mind to open a boarding-school for the children of well-to-do people. She saw, in such an undertaking, a means of recruiting for her Society members capable of carrying on the works of zeal which lay open before it in England. "If we had a house for children of the upper class, as I desire," she wrote on March 8, "we should then obtain subjects, but in this, as in all else, may the holy will of God be done." Her long cherished wish was at last realized. In January, 1841, she purchased the fine freehold property of Gumley House, Isleworth, about ten miles out of London.[1] In

[1] Gumley House was built at the end of the seventeenth century by John Gumley, Esq. His daughter, Maria Gumley, was a celebrated beauty of her time. She married William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, an eminent statesman in the reigns of Anne and the first Georges. After Mr. Gumley's death the Earl of Bath resided at Gumley House. The property, later on, was purchased by Lord Lake and, after passing through various hands, was bought in 1841 by Madame d'Houet. It is highly probable that in the days of the Earl of Bath, Pope, from his residence at Twickenham hard by, was a visitor at Gumley House; Addison, too, Dr. Johnson, and other distinguished literary men may easily at one time or another have been the Earl's guests. Be this as it may, Maria Gumley is mentioned in Pope's "Miscellanies," with a compliment, though at the expense of her husband.

"But charming Gumley's lost in Pulteney's wife."

Amongst interesting historical spots close to Gumley House are Syon Abbey, for Bridgittine nuns, and a Cistercian monastery, both built by Henry V. Shakespeare alludes to these in his "Henry V ".

"I have built two chantries where the sad and solemn priests
Still sing for Richard's soul."

The Earl of Shrewsbury had a seat at Isleworth, at a spot called Shrewsbury Place, where a Catholic Church was built. There is reason to believe that, throughout the ages of persecution, the sanctuary lamp, extinguished in most parts of England, still burned in the little church at Isleworth before the Blessed Sacrament.

The Blessed John Hale, Vicar of Isleworth, and the Blessed

this transaction Dr. Griffiths, then Vicar-Apostolic of the London District, assisted the religious with his

Richard Reynolds, of Syon Abbey, were martyred at Tyburn, 4 May, 1535.

Among many distinguished personages who have entered into close relations with the Gumley House Convent were the sons of the exiled King of the French and their families. The Duc de Nemours, eldest surviving son of Louis Philippe, had two daughters, the Princess Blanche and the Princess Marguerite, who were pupils at Gumley House, whither they drove each morning from their home in Bushey Park. It will be remembered that their mother, Princess Victoire of Saxe Coburg, was a specially loved cousin of Queen Victoria's. On her early death the two motherless little princesses became objects of Her Majesty's particular affection and interest. She frequently invited them to Windsor, and elsewhere, to spend the day with her children. In the "Letters of Queen Victoria" constant reference is made to the de Nemours, and especially to: "My beloved Vic with her lovely face, who is perfection, and so cheerful". . . . Princess Blanche made her First Communion, and was confirmed, in the chapel in Gumley House on 12 June, 1869, on which occasion her relatives the Duke and Duchess d'Aumale, the Prince de Joinville, the Duke de Chartres, the Comte de Paris, and other French princes were present, with her father, the Duke de Nemours, her sister and two brothers, the Comte d'Eu, who afterwards married the Princess Isabelle, daughter of the last Emperor of Brazil, and the Duke d'Alençon, who married Princess Sophie of Bavaria, sister to the unfortunate Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, and who, it will be remembered, perished, a victim of heroism and devotedness, at the Charity Bazaar in Paris some years ago.

Another imposing ceremony, which also took place in the convent chapel, was the First Communion of the Duke de Guise, son of the Duke d'Aumale. The French royal personages from Bushey, Twickenham, and Kingston-on-Thames, often heard Mass in the Gumley Chapel, and approached the Holy Table there with that dignity and piety which they had inherited from saintly ancestors. It was a rare thing if at Sunday Benediction, besides the de Nemours, other of the exiled royalties were not present. After the service and a sermon by Monsignor Weld, the chaplain, they would take a cup of tea, stroll about the beautiful grounds, and interest themselves in

advice and experience, and helped them substantially by lending a part of the purchase-money. At the end of January, Madame d'Houet came to England to open the new house. From the outset, and during its long career, Gumley House has been a most successful and flourishing educational establishment.

The next year Father Kirwan, parish priest of Oughterarde in the Diocese of Galway, Ireland, invited the Faithful Companions of Jesus to open a convent in his parish, adding that he would be in a position to send a certain number of postulants to the Society. In 1843 Mother Julia Guillemet went to Oughterarde to open the convent and, a little later, a small novitiate was organized there. Madame d'Houet wrote to Mother Julia before she left for Ireland expressing her sorrow at not being able herself to initiate this important step.

what was going on at the convent. The de Nemours princesses were received as Children of Mary at Gumley, where their names may be seen on the register. Occasionally some of the elder pupils were invited to Bushey House for the afternoon, and had the honour of sitting at table with the Duke and his sons. On one such occasion the invited guests were too overpowered by their surroundings to do full justice to the choice menu prepared for them. Their gracious hosts noticed this and had the cakes and other sweetmeats packed in a box and sent to the convent with the children, who were surprised, on entering their school refectory, to find the French delicacies awaiting them. . . . On the downfall of the third Napoleon, and the establishment of the Republic in 1870, the exiled Orleans princes were allowed to return to France. For many years they kept up friendly intercourse with Gumley Convent. The late Duke d'Alençon, when he visited this country, made a call at Gumley one of his social engagements. Amongst many souvenirs of the illustrious and charming de Nemours family at Gumley is a large doll's house given by Princess Blanche d'Orleans. It was a gift she had received from Queen Victoria. The princess was happy to offer it as a memento of her school days at Gumley.

After giving some wise directions and encouraging Mother Julia to hear bravely her trials and responsibilities, for she had many just then, the holy Foundress adds: "Tell me at once what you think, and if you consider my presence to be really necessary. I would come over on receipt of your reply. Courage and confidence, my dear daughter, but before all things great confidence. Farewell, let us pray much. Try to finish this foundation quickly, since our houses in London feel the need of your being on the spot, as you full well know. The enemy of souls is enraged with us." A few days later she wrote: "You must make the postulants observe the ordinary regulations. Do not permit them to fail in religious silence, and correct them with gentleness. I intend to go to Ireland as soon as possible, where it is very important that everything should be placed on a right footing from the very beginning. Before all else let us pray much and let us offer ourselves to God to do and to suffer what He wishes." On January 29 she again writes: "I fancy you must by now be in your new house with your postulants. How much I should have liked to be with you to help you as best I could! We shall offer Holy Communion on February 2 for the prosperity of this little house in Ireland. Be careful each morning to say the Litany of Our Lady, and to remind Her that She is the Mistress of Novices in all our houses. In any perplexity, say the 'Veni Creator' before Our Lady's statue and then act as it seems best to you!"

Madame d'Houet spent the last three months of the year 1843 at Nantes. She then, though ill at the time, set out for England, but merely passed through London en route for Ireland, with the idea of training the young postulants by degrees, in the observance of the rules which had

not been sufficiently insisted upon. The Superior-General determined firmly and gently at once to establish observance in its full vigour. She began by enforcing such points as the rising at a fixed hour, the keeping of silence, and the making the conversation in recreation time general. On July 2, the Bishop of Galway presided at the clothing of eight of the first Irish novices.

In Abbé Martin's life of Madame d'Houet there are some interesting details which he had gathered from one of the religious who took part in the early labours of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in Ireland. The account gives an idea of the important work undertaken by them in that country.

"The Poor-school was at once established and went on satisfactorily. Soon it counted seventy children. On the Feast of Corpus Christi forty of these made their First Communion. It was very easy to prepare them; for their souls like virgin earth gave back abundant-fold the smallest seed implanted therein. These children edified us by their dispositions in which faith and piety were so conspicuous. We procured neat clothes for the poorest amongst them and, in order to give a sort of uniformity to their costume, made them wear little white tulle bonnets with blue strings. On the Feast they assembled at an early hour in the school, whence they walked in procession to the church, all the country people turning out to view the pretty and unique sight. The simple unsophisticated villagers had never imagined anything so ceremonious, and were proud of their children being admired by all. In the country districts of Ireland, at this epoch, religious ceremonies were rare. The penal days had left their mark upon the land, and Catholicity only emerged furtively from holes and hiding places, in this early period of emancipation. The Sunday service consisted of Low Mass followed by sermon or instruction; there was no such thing as Vespers, while Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament had not yet been in many places so much as heard of. As in the actual days of persecution, baptisms and marriages were celebrated in private houses while, in order to supplement the small number of churches, twice in the year, at outlying districts, 'Stations' were held. There were stations at Christmas and Easter, when the priests of the parishes went to the scattered villages to hear confessions and administer the sacraments,

Mass was celebrated the next morning in the most suitable house, where the congregation received Holy Communion. The priests travelled from village to village until they had traversed the entire parish—and that of Oughterarde then extended over an area of eighteen miles. In those far-off days, and among a people which our nineteenth century would call primitive, the impression produced by the public function of the first Communion-day can easily be imagined."

Madame d'Houet remained at Oughterarde until the end of July, and in the following year again visited Ireland. That country had always evoked her deepest sympathy. She admired the courageous and staunch fidelity of its people to the ancient faith, and eagerly looked forward to her Society's unfurling its standard in this Island of Saints. The foundation at Oughterardè was in remote Connemara : so she was desirous of making a foundation in a more central spot. She was welcomed cordially by the Most Rev. Dr. Ryan, the Bishop of Limerick, who helped her by his useful advice. The initial difficulty of purchasing a suitable house being overcome, it only remained for her to mature the plans for the new foundation. The property called Laurel Hill was specially adapted for a first-class boarding-school as it had fine grounds and was agreeably situated overlooking the picturesque Shannon. Madame d'Houet presided at the opening and remained six months in Ireland. During her stay she devoted the intervals between her duties to long hours of prayer. One whose privilege it was to be her companion describes her as coming forth from prayer fortified with the strength and sweetness she had imbibed from the "Fountains of the Saviour". On such occasions her countenance was irradiated with the expression of happiness and peace which reflected the Divine Presence of Him with whom she had conversed in His audience chamber.

In this same year, 1844, another opening was offered to the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Father Parker, the priest in charge of St. Patrick's, Liverpool, who had heard of their work from the parish priest of Oughterarde, asked them to take over the charge of his Elementary Schools. Here, in this great commercial town, for the first time in England, a really vast field was thrown open to the daughters of Madame d'Houet. Truly, to use Our Lord's own words, "the field was white for the harvest". In this particular parish were not only hundreds of children in the Elementary Schools entrusted to the religious but, over and above, women, counted too by hundreds, came after their hard day's toil to listen to the gentle voice of the nun, as she recalled to their memories the truths of religion, and brought them back to the practice of the faith of their childhood. Manifestly such work as this was not miscalled when termed a "mission". Madame d'Houet's heart throbbed with joy, but with prudent self-restraint and discretion she controlled her enthusiasm and zeal. Mother Julia presided over this important foundation; but the Foundress guided her every step by correspondence. In one of her letters we read: "As for instructing the adults, tell Father Parker that I desire it even more than he does, for, personally, these poor women appeal to me very strongly. I intended you to set about it at once; only he asked you to begin by the day-school for girls of the upper class. You know that I made this the first step because he said the need was so pressing. God alone who is omnipotent can undertake all things simultaneously, but we poor mortals must take both the means and the time." She then suggested that to meet all demands the adult women should come on Sundays and only for religious instruction.

On this occasion, as in every previous foundation, we find Madame d'Houet insisting on her usual provisos —the observance of the rule and the preservation of the spirit and the customs of the Society. This fresh venture at Liverpool, with its possibilities for good, preoccupied her considerably. She writes to Mother Julia on December 6, 1844, "You cannot be more anxious than I am to meet Father Parker's wishes. The glory of God and the gratitude we owe this good priest require us to do so; therefore I will do all in my power to satisfy him, though we must not and cannot displease God by failing in the observance of our rules. If you once allow infringements of these, people will soon find pretexts for setting aside any regulation which does not fall in with their particular ideas or convenience. Our Society is upheld only by prayer and fidelity; its very name indicates this. Therefore, my dear daughter, withstand any innovation. I can sympathize with you at this juncture, for I am only too conscious how painful it is to refuse these good priests, each of whom seeks solely God's glory and the particular advantage of his own parish. Let us pray much. It is necessary that crosses should strengthen our foundations."

This letter appears to have crossed one from Mother Julia in which she explains the measures finally taken in Liverpool for carrying out the several classes of zealous work in demand. The explanations were satisfactory and reassuring. The very day she received them she wrote again to Mother Julia: "Make yourself happy, my dear daughter, I am very glad that my other letter had not reached you when you wrote, for the arrangement made by the Bishop appears perfectly satisfactory. You see if there is no possibility of consulting superiors, obedience consists in doing what one feels the Superior

would wish to be done in the case. When subordinates act in this spirit things generally turn out well. Therefore my previous orders are now cancelled." "Let us bless and thank God," she writes ten days later, "for the way in which matters have been settled in Liverpool."

In opening a new establishment one sees what was ever uppermost in the mind of the Foundress, namely, the exact observance of the rule. This strikes one throughout her life, and she returns to the subject in season and out of season. "I confess, my dear daughter," she writes in the course of the summer of 1844, "what occupies my mind the most at present is the exact carrying out of our holy rules. I must talk the matter over with you when we meet. I am more than ever convinced that even temporal success depends upon our fidelity to them. Our Society was established by supernatural agency and it can be preserved only by supernatural help, that is, by God Himself. Let us be content that the Society perish rather than that any of us underrate holy obedience."[1] "As to obedience, the rule obliges us to do, without questioning it, what is commanded. No excuse can dispense us. To plead that circumstances and times have altered is a handle that the devil is fond of taking hold of to meet his own ends. God will certainly destroy all our houses if obedience ceases to be practised in the spirit of our holy rules."[2] "It is a great comfort to me to realize that your chief wish is to have our holy rules perfectly observed. That is the essential point and what God requires from us before all else. If we are faithful to our rules, He will give us abundantly all besides."[3] "What consolation you give me, my dear daughter, in telling me that our Sisters keep

[1] 5 December, 1844. [2] 6 December, 1844.
[3] 19 December, 1844.

and follow the spirit of our rules, and thus carry lovingly the holy sweet yoke of obedience! May Our Lord bless you more and more, my dear daughters, for you have filled my soul with joy. For myself, I desire before everything else that our holy rules be strictly observed, because I well know that, in that case, God will do the rest."

The years 1843 and 1844 were marked, more than by aught else, by trials and contradictions. Madame d'Houet had to bear the cross of physical suffering and weakness which increased with her years and had besides many causes of mental suffering. At a time when likely openings were being offered to the Society, she had but few experienced subjects to put into posts of trust. Again, the houses in England were not self-supporting, some because of their *raison-d'être* itself; others, because they were not as yet firmly established. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that troubles of almost every kind were increasing and multiplying around her; but in the midst of anxieties, as ever, she placed her whole trust in God. He alone was her refuge and her stay. "Let us pray much, and with courage and confidence," she wrote in January, 1844; "remind our Lord and the Blessed Virgin that we made the foundations in England only at their bidding." "We must keep up our courage," she writes on February 24 of the same year, when certain difficulties connected with Liverpool were perplexing her, "the evil one is enraged with us, but is not God all-powerful? He Himself is the Founder and Supporter of the Society. Let us practise our holy rules with fidelity and then, like the Israelites of old when they were faithful to God, He will fight for us." She wrote to Limerick on November 17: "Pray for me. For-

tunately crosses do not fail me either; we might degenerate if we were without them."

For two or three years after the foundation of the convents at Limerick and Liverpool there were no new undertakings, nevertheless the life of the holy woman was none the less laborious. To give our readers some idea of her work, which increased as time went on, we need but mention the frequent journeys she was obliged to make from the time of her return from Rome, until the foundation of the house at Paris, that is from 1837 to 1847. After a short rest she went to spend the closing days of 1837, partly at Carouge, partly at Bourges. In 1838 we find her successively at Asti and Turin, from which latter city she journeyed to Genoa in the hope of opening a house there. During the next two years (1838 to 1840), she again went, at different intervals, to Carouge, Turin, Nice, Bourges, Amiens, Menotey, and Ancona where there was question of a foundation, and lastly to Langres. In February, 1841, she set out for England, whither the foundation of Gumley House called her. While there she heard of the serious illness of one of her especially loved daughters. She wrote: "My dear Mothers E. and J., may God's will be accomplished in all things by us. This good Master knows how ardently I desire Mother Josephine's [1] recovery, still, if He wishes that her sufferings should even increase, I too wish it and think that it is best for her and best for us. O my dearly beloved daughters! do not, I beg you, let us draw back like cowards from fulfilling God's adorable will. What are twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years of life, for those who are destined to live for eternity in the enjoyment of all good

[1] Mother Josephine Petit who succeeded Madame d'Houet in September, 1858, as Superior-General.

things! Let our dear Mother Josephine pray for the Society and for me, at the present moment, not by words, but by offering her sufferings for this intention. I believe, my dear daughters, that God wishes me to realize the nothingness of earthly things even in the beautiful spot in which I now am." (Here follows a description of the new property, Gumley House, with its trees, flowers, and birds.)

Madame d'Houet remained at Gumley House until the end of July. She seems to have spent August at Carouge. From September to December her letters are dated from Nice. Towards the middle of December she left for Turin, and in the first days of January, 1842, we find her again at Carouge. The journey thither in a particularly hard winter was trying and dangerous. "You had reason to pray for me after I left," she wrote to Turin on her arrival at Carouge: "I had a terrible journey. The conveyance was overturned twice on Mont Cenis and a blizzard arose which obliged us to make a three hours' halt. Our sleighs were insecurely fastened together, so that the snow drifting in through chinks covered us, and it was bitterly cold all the time. Next evening, while we were driving on a good road our horses took fright and upset the conveyance into a field five feet lower than the highway. It turned over on the side where I was sitting, so that I had to bear the weight of my fellow travellers plus that of their hand luggage. Poor Maria came down heavily upon me to her great distress. I might have been killed or, at any rate, have met with a serious accident, had not God in His infinite mercy preserved me. So far I feel none the worse, except for a few bruises which I trust will leave no after effects. I forgot to mention that when we remounted our sleighs the ice had broken, so

we had to remain where we stood for ten hours. You see, my dear Mother Sophie, a mail-coach is not more to be relied upon in such weather than an ordinary diligence, though the drivers are steadier and the horses less mettlesome. I ask you all to offer three Holy Communions in thanksgiving for our safety. Had the horses become unmanageable a few moments sooner, they would have dashed us into an abyss, whence I could not have sent you a letter!"

Madame d'Houet next visited Nantes, Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, Gumley House, Menotey, Carouge, and Nice, while in 1843 she went to London and Ireland, and on her return set out in succession for Menotey, Carouge, and Turin. In 1844 and 1845 she divided her time between Bourges, Amiens, and England. She thus visited England three times during the years 1842 to 1845.

While realizing the unabated energy and zeal displayed by the holy Foundress in these trying journeys, and at a time too when her health was undermined, and when her soul was passing through the furnace of tribulation, one has to acknowledge that the physical and moral strength of her nature must have been supplemented by powerful graces. The first seven months of 1846 found her once more at Carouge. For a few years previously she had chosen this house as her habitual residence, whenever the duties of her office did not call her elsewhere; and here, too, she established the first regular noviceship of the Society. This year the novices had increased in number, some having accompanied her from England, others having followed later. She undertook the duties of novice-mistress with a motherly affection, solicitude, and tact which these privileged daughters of hers never afterwards forgot.

During the last months of this year she visited Menotey, Nantes, and Amiens. At the end of October she went to England for a fortnight, passing some time at Amiens on her return, and leaving for Carouge in December, where business detained her until July 15 in the following year.[1]

[1] These constant journeys furnished the Foundress with continual opportunities of practising poverty and mortification. Before starting she always visited the chapel and asked Our Lady's blessing and, when passing any town, she had the habit of adoring the Most Holy Sacrament in the churches there, of invoking the Guardian Angels, protectors of the country, and of praying for the dead who rested in the graveyards. On her arrival at her convents her first visit was to the chapel. On one such occasion she surprised the Superior by the question: "Is the Blessed Sacrament here?" As a matter of fact, by an oversight of the priest, the sacred species had been consumed. Nothing outwardly betrayed the fact, and it must have been an inspiration which revealed to His handmaid the absence of Our Lord's Sacramental Presence.

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Howrah House, Poplar, London, E.

Founded 1881

[*See p.* 360]

Photo: Elliott & Fry

St. Joseph's Convent, West Hartlepool, Durham

Founded 1885

[*See p.* 360]

CHAPTER XV.

GENERAL SURVEY OF THE WORKS OF THE SOCIETY IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND.

The development of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in England and Ireland was attended by many consoling and encouraging events. We quote some details from the life of Madame d'Houet written by Abbé Martin. He says :—

"Though convent boarding-schools exist in such numbers at the present day in England and Ireland, the Faithful Companions of Jesus were almost the first communities to initiate the movement. It was their custom to open side by side with their boarding-schools large day-schools, a system which recommended itself strongly to English parents, as by this means their children received the benefits of a school-training and, at the same time, enjoyed home life in the evening. Next came the elementary schools. This work was of immense importance ; for the poorer Catholics by the Penal Laws had been too long deprived of all instruction from Catholic teachers with the lamentable result that these children had no alternative but to go to the well-endowed Protestant institutions. As was only natural, many lost the faith which their fathers had preserved through centuries of persecution. Thanks to the zealous efforts of an energetic clergy, this danger was being diminished, and it was hoped that in the near future

every parish would have its own primary school, especially as the English Education Department was willing to grant state-aid to those Catholic schools in which the teachers were certified. It is a satisfaction and an honour to the Catholic cause to know that the Government Inspectors look upon Religious engaged in teaching as second to none, in devotedness and skill as instructors. The Faithful Companions of Jesus have under their charge a considerable number of these primary schools. At Manchester they teach in seven large schools. The Sisters' fixed abode is their convent which is managed by a local superior, but each morning they set out for the different parish-schools, returning only in the evening. The number of children attending these schools is usually considerable. The smallest count perhaps two or three hundred; the largest over a thousand. We have alluded to these schools as being free, but the expression is scarcely correct. The English and Irish poor preserve a feeling of independence which makes them resent the idea of their children receiving gratuitous instruction.[1] They give a penny or so a week for 'school pence,' as it is called. They pay it or do *not* pay it, as the case may be, but it is understood that the tuition is not free. This notion was so strong in the days of which we are speaking, that when certain Protestant sects, in a spirit of philanthropy and perhaps of proselytism, endowed purely gratuitous schools, these institutions at once fell into disfavour. Those whom they were intended to benefit called them 'Ragged Schools'. Alas! the scholars even if supposed to pay weekly school pence were

[1] Abbé Martin's remark is in no way applicable to the present generation. The Education Bill of 1893 has succeeded in stifling such sentiments.

scarcely better clad. It is very difficult to form an idea of the poverty of these little children. Most of them are clothed in unsightly rags and often they have not even a crust of bread for a meal. On Sunday they have to borrow clothes to assist at Mass with becoming decency, and to meet this want, clothing clubs have had to be organized. One outcome of their training in the schools is remarkable. They are taught a love of cleanliness, order, and method in their work; and a few years under the Sisters' care usually results in wonderful improvement both physical and moral. Without these schools and the co-operation of the devoted teaching-orders, the unfortunate children would grow up in filth and squalor, and the hall-mark of Catholicity would be all but obliterated from their souls. Through the charity of the nuns, who are even more devoted than mothers, since they look to both body and soul, the children grow up fairly instructed, tractable, and practical Catholics. Later on their thrifty habits enable them to gain a modest livelihood or, at any rate, to raise themselves somewhat above the lowest rungs of the social ladder. In almost all the parishes the night-schools are an indispensable adjunct to the day-schools, and the good effect of the former cannot be over-estimated. It is well known that in English manufacturing towns child labour is largely employed in the factories.[1] If Christian charity did not come to the aid of the frail lives engulfed, as it were, in the vortex of industry and trade, they would infallibly lose all remembrance of God and grow up an ignorant, Philistine population seeking in vicious surroundings the natural gratification of passion. The

[1] This refers to the time before the Factory Act was passed. Mrs. Browning's beautiful poem: "The Cry of the Children," sounded a pathetic note, not to be silenced, on the sad subject.

number of little girls who by reason of a life of premature toil are thrown into the most dangerous surroundings is appalling. The night-school alone is their refuge and their salvation. Thither they flock often accompanied by their elders, from whom they are separated during the classes. Such is the *raison-d'être* of the night-schools held after the day's work is over."

Let us listen to the testimony of one of the Sisters, written in 1863. "The good done by these night-schools is incalculable. They have almost transformed the uncultured, ignorant young women in such towns as Liverpool and Manchester. The earnestness and punctuality displayed by them in frequenting the classes is most edifying. St. Patrick's schools, attached to the parish of that name in Liverpool, are an example of the good done by the Faithful Companions of Jesus during the twenty years they have taught there. Up to the year 1844 this district was a centre of ignorance and vice. Now it is one of the best conducted quarters of the town, and the priests, who in turn have been attached to the mission, agree that the change dates from the time when the Sisters undertook the management of the schools. The night-school has given birth to the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin which is established among the children and the adults of all ages. In the schools the Sisters select the most pious and industrious of their scholars, and form them into sodalities under the patronage of our Lady. Membership is looked upon as a distinction, so the numbers are numerous. In the parish of St. Patrick's there are 250, while in some other districts there are quite double this number. The meetings are held on Sundays, and all approach the Sacraments at least once a month. Other good works are the re-unions of the poor women of the

parish. They meet one evening in the week and on Sunday afternoons, when the Sisters teach them catechism and instruct and dispose them for the Sacraments. It has been said that no work of zeal in England has been more fruitful in good. One of the nuns in Liverpool writes: 'The parish of St. Patrick's presents a wide field for this type of mission work. It is the resort of a number of poor Irish families whom destitution has forced to quit their fatherland. The greater number come from out-of-the-way country districts in Ireland far removed from the populous centres. The clergy there, too few in these days to attend to the spiritual wants of their widely dispersed flocks, can visit them but rarely, and stay but a very short time with them. Thus these poor people grow up sadly ignorant of their religion and, when they settle in the land of their exile, and wish to approach the Sacraments, the priests often find them wanting in the needful knowledge. When there are nuns in the parish, the priests are only too happy to hand over such cases to them. In Liverpool, from the outset, the Faithful Companions of Jesus received these poor women with open arms. The first comers were attracted by the gracious welcome and the practical instructions given, and soon returned accompanied by their friends. The meetings were held regularly on Thursday and Sunday evenings from six to seven. Soon the two evenings a week proved insufficient, for the numbers rapidly swelled. The priests therefore begged the Sisters to hold the meetings every evening. Each week they had to deal with fresh sad cases; persons came who had not approached the Sacraments for four, ten, twenty, thirty and even forty years. However, happily, there were always also many new converts to be instructed.'"

Father Parker wrote to Madame d'Houet in 1848, praising the admirable work done by her daughters and thanking her for the zealous co-operation which he received from them. "Your Sisters have a special grace for instructing our poor women. We notice that once these good people have been under instruction with them, they make good confessions and we already perceive a distinct change for the better in the parish. Indeed, in the case of the majority, the transformation astounds us. It often happens that these poor creatures present themselves to us in the confessional, unkempt and barely covered with unsightly rags, their sordid surroundings having all but obliterated every vestige of civilization. We send them to your Sisters for instructions, and in three weeks or so they return decently clad, well prepared for the Sacraments, and both ready and happy to begin a new Christian life. I have arranged with my assistant priest that in future, of this class we shall admit to the Sacraments only such newcomers to the parish as bring a note signed by the Sister responsible for their instructions. In our many heavy parish duties, it is a relief for us to be able to hand over these ill-instructed poor women to your nuns, and to feel that we can rely upon their ready and willing work."

It would be difficult to picture the alacrity with which these women flocked to the instructions of "their dear nuns" as they affectionately styled them. Everywhere the Sisters were loved and respected. In one of the convents the Sister charged with the instruction of the women, saw with satisfaction and pleasure that her schoolroom was quite crowded. She feared that her voice might not carry to the end of the room, so raising it, she said: "Do you all hear me well?" "Yes," was the reply from the farthest corner: "Yes, we all hear you,

Mother, and we are devouring your words." So great, as a matter of fact, was the indisputable good wrought that, for the sake of more ample accommodation, the parish priest seriously meditated having the gathering in the church. The nuns, as it may be supposed, shrank from the idea of such a step. A veritable thirst for religious instruction is remarked whenever the work of teaching adult women is undertaken in a parish. Above all, at the time of parochial missions, the instructing of the women becomes important, and the nuns cheerfully accept the lion's share of the work. The schoolroom is then used as the overflow assembly-hall of the church, so that the nuns may supplement the work of the missioners. God only can reckon up the good results obtained, for all is done quietly, without any show, in that spirit of humility which inspires the zealous efforts of all true servants of Him who was "meek and lowly of heart".

Another account of the progress of this branch of zealous work is dated 1862. "These familiar instructions have been carried on in Liverpool for the past seventeen years. In the beginning four to five hundred women attended; now the number has appreciably diminished. The explanation is very simple. After years of regular attendance at the meetings, nearly all who are willing to be so are fully instructed and frequent the Sacraments regularly. For some reason or other the numbers have not diminished in other places, for example, in Ireland and in Manchester, where the devout poor women still gather in their hundreds to listen to the Sisters.

The Sunday work comprised the teaching in numerously attended classes of children, the instructing of poor women as we have just said, and generally the

holding of evening classes as well. Each parish sent any who on this day were at liberty to take part in one of the various meetings, presided over by the nuns. The time was devoted exclusively to religious instruction and to the teaching of the social duties of Catholics. Sometimes charity inspired the wealthier members of the congregation to give a stimulus and an encouragement to the different associations by paying for a treat. This might take the form of a tea-party, so appreciated by scholars of every age, or else of the giving of prizes to the children. The joy and appreciation of these poor people on such occasions well rewarded any sacrifice which the rich made for their sake. So true is it that charity "equally blesses him that gives and him that receives".

Dr. Turner,[1] Bishop of Salford, wrote an appreciative letter to Madame d'Houet, which is cited by Abbé Martin :—

"Since we have had the privilege of possessing the Faithful Companions of Jesus in our diocese," writes Bishop Turner, "we have had reason to rejoice. First, and above all, we are happy to testify that the good nuns are distinguished by the two essential virtues of the religious life—charity and obedience. Charity among themselves and charity towards their neighbour ; obedience and fidelity to the rules and orders of their superiors. Armed with this double buckler of Christian perfection, they are, wherever God is pleased to send them, the ministering angels of the children under their

[1] William Turner, born September 25, 1800; consecrated Bishop of Salford July 25, 1851; died July 13, 1872. His immediate successor in the See of Salford was the late Cardinal Herbert Vaughan who shared Bishop Turner's esteem and affection for the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

charge, and effect immense good in all departments of Christian education. In their dealings with the children of the wealthy, the middle class, and the poor they are distinguished by the same gentle charity which attracts these young people and encourages them to the practice of virtue. Their kind words, their good example, their patient forebearance, produce wonderful results on the minds and hearts of those whom they teach and train. The sentiments of the children's parents are identical with mine. Fathers and mothers of families not only bear witness to the truth of what I say, but one and all congratulate themselves on having placed their children under an influence at once so refined and so far-reaching. The young girls themselves look upon the good religious not merely as their teachers, but bear them an affection bordering on that which they have for their own mothers.[1] We can say without exaggeration that there is scarcely a young girl in the large parishes where the nuns are established, who has not received, or is not receiving actually at their hands, a Christian education and a practical religious training. Moreover, when these children are withdrawn from their direct control, the nuns like gentle mothers still continue to direct them along the dangerous road of life, especially at the age when temptations are strongest and most seductive. For the poorer classes, this good work is carried on by means of the Sunday-school and the night-school. There is no need to assure you, Monsieur l'Abbé, that our worthy priests who are overcharged with the urgent duties of the sacred ministry most

[1] Is this surprising, since even the pagan writer Quintilian writes: "Discipulos id unum moneo, ut præceptores suos non minus quam ipsa studia ament, et parentes esse, non quidem corporum sed mentium credant?"

willingly avail themselves of the charity and zeal of the Sisters to lessen somewhat their own grave responsibilities in the care of souls. Moreover, they confide to the instruction of the nuns the large number of the Protestants desirous to embrace our holy faith, who beforehand require instruction and preparation. One of the grand secrets of the nuns' success is, to my mind, their devotion to our Lady and their fidelity in corresponding with God's grace.

"But all I have said, Monsieur l'Abbé, is very general. In England one must see and study the Faithful Companions of Jesus, in their special sphere of work, in order duly to appreciate them. Let me paint you a portrait of any one of the Sisters. You see at once that she knows how to make herself loved, and at the same time respected. She can say 'Yes' but she can also say 'No'; and in training the character of her children she strives to develop the hardy traits which will stand exposure in the world. If it happens that a child, on leaving school, becomes careless, the maternal instinct of the good Sister is aroused; she sends for the erring one; speaks gently to her; points out her faults; and induces her to go to the Sacraments. On the approach of a solemn feast of our Lady she revives in her children the fervour of their love for this dear Mother. When grave difficulties occur in families, or misunderstandings arise to the detriment of Christian charity, the Sister succeeds by her gentle influence in restoring peace and harmony. Truly, it needs the spirit of this holy congregation to work such things. I will not speak of the nuns' proficiency in secular knowledge, a proficiency which places their work on an equality with the best in the country. But I cannot end this letter without expressing the happiness and the satisfaction I feel, as a pastor

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus,
St. Margaret's Convent, Paisley, N.B.
Founded 1889 [*See p.* 360]

Photo: Stackemann & Co., Teddington

Salford Training College, Sedgley Park, Prestwich, Manchester
Founded 1904 [*See p.* 361]

of souls, in possessing this holy Institute in my diocese. If anyone interested in my statements desires to see for himself the reality of what I have attempted to describe, let him visit the parishes of our diocese of Salford, and he will find Christian education carried on therein with all energy and activity. He will see night-schools frequented by hundreds of young persons, day-schools with their hundreds of little children, Sunday-schools for adults, Sodalities for our Lady, and many other pious works each counting by hundreds those who profit by them. These works are in a flourishing condition amid Protestant surroundings, in a town where dangerous occasions, incentives to pleasures, indifference, irreligion, not to mention other perils which shipwreck so many young souls—abound and increase daily. You understand then, Monsieur L'Abbé, that it is not without reason that I am happy to extend my patronage to, and to express my esteem for this holy congregation."

CHAPTER XVI.

FURTHER FOUNDATIONS—PARIS, GENTILLY, ENGLAND.

1847-1854.

For some years Madame d'Houet had wished to make a foundation in Paris. It would be convenient and useful for her to have a "pied à terre" in Paris, for it was a central point between the several countries in which the Society had houses. The time seemed ripe. The Archbishop, Monseigneur Affre, had had relations with the Amiens house, where he had occasionally done duty as chaplain, and was full of esteem for the Society and its Foundress. In the spring of 1845, when she was passing through Paris, the Archbishop gave Madame d'Houet an audience and listened favourably to her proposal. According to her custom she recommended this matter with earnestness to Notre Dame des Victoires. It was not, however, until 1847 that she definitely made up her mind to execute her plan. The initial work she proposed was to rent a small house and take in girls to be taught sewing. By this means she felt that good would be done, and at the same time the unpretentious building would shelter her and her daughters, as they passed through Paris *en route* for their other convents. She therefore rented a house in Rue l'Ouest, where some poor children were taught on week days and young workwomen encouraged to pass the Sunday.

Denis Auguste Affre, Archbishop of Paris
Born Sept. 27, 1793. Killed whilst seeking to make peace at the barricade in the Faubourg St. Antoine, Paris, June 27, 1848
Devoted friend and protector of the Faithful Companions of Jesus

His Eminence Cardinal François Marie Benjamin Richard, Archbishop of Paris
Born at Nantes, March 1, 1819. Died at Paris, January 28, 1908
Devoted friend and protector of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, who initiated the process for the Beatification of their Foundress [*See p.* 362]

The difficulty of keeping up even this humble beginning was great, and it was a time of terrible distress. "We are everywhere in great straits," wrote Madame d'Houet to Mother Maria Lenssens, in February, 1847, "not only in Ireland but in all our houses. Food is just double the normal price, and far from being able to raise our fees, we are obliged to reduce them, for the state of the money market is telling on every one. These are the acts of charity and the alms which God asks of us, for if these children were withdrawn from our influence, many of them might be placed in schools where their faith would be in danger."

However, at this same epoch her horizon broadened. Instead of simple needlework classes, Archbishop Affre suggested that Madame d'Houet should open an upper class boarding school, assuring her that, in spite of existing establishments, there was a wide field for work. She recognized God's will manifesting itself through the voice of His representative, and though she foresaw obstacles, she went forward confidently and courageously. She ordered prayers to be said in her convents. "Pray much for the Paris foundation," she wrote to Amiens on June 20, 1847; "I hope to go there soon." In August, she wrote to Carouge: "Yes, my dear Mother, I feel that you and these kind priests have prayed for me, but I still am much in need of help". "Beg prayers for my intention," she wrote again on October 10, "particularly at the meeting of the Sodalists; and also ask them of those who watch before the Blessed Sacrament. I do beg of you, ask them to pray fervently for me and to say the Rosary for my intention. The devil is wily and prepared to destroy us, if God does not help us." She writes to Amiens on November 23: "Pray for me. I have such need of prayers. The devil is opposing us,

but God is our help, and His Holy Mother is our good protectress.

Towards the end of the year 1847, Madame d'Houet purchased at Paris two properties adjoining one another in the Rue de la Santé. At the end of March, 1848, she sent one of the mothers and three lay-Sisters to begin the foundation, as the poor children of the Rue l'Ouest were not transferred there for fear of destroying the prospects of a future boarding-school. We find her again in Paris at the end of April, but she merely passed through, on her way to the three houses in England, Somers Town, Gumley House, and Liverpool. Towards the middle of July she went to Amiens, and about three months later once more to Paris, where from this date she fixed her permanent abode. She wrote a short time later to the community of Carouge which had for so long enjoyed the privilege of being the mother-house: "Good-bye, my dear daughters, I grieve to think that the time when I shall see you again is perhaps far off. God is Master of all, and we must wish only to do His holy will."

The political disturbances of this year 1848 did not prevent the Foundress from continuing her work, for her confidence in God rendered her fearless. She wrote to one of the local superiors who expressed anxiety as to the position. "If religious show alarm, what can one expect from secular persons? Come, my dear daughter, do not be childish; do not squander precious time in trifling."

Nevertheless, the revolutionary storm had swept away the only earthly support of the Society in Paris—the intrepid Archbishop, Monseigneur Affre, who fell a victim to his self-sacrifice and devotedness. At this

same epoch the house of Turin was threatened anew with outside interference, while the position of the houses in England, and especially of that of Somers Town, continued to be a source of anxiety. At that particular time several other religious communities of women had come into England and settled in the neighbourhood of Somers Town. Mother Julia, who was Provincial, expressed her anxiety to her Superior-General. Here is the reply: "Dear Mother Julia, Let us thank God, that He is sending new communities into England to further His glory. Let us try to accomplish His will and do the work He entrusts to us, be it little or be it great. In return He will give us Himself for all eternity. If that does not satisfy us, we must be very hard to please. The Apostle St. James converted only five persons, and still he enjoys as much as the others the rank and title of Apostle." According to her custom the venerable Mother, in the midst of all her anxieties, placed her entire strength and hope in prayer: "Offer one or two Communions on Mondays, in honour of the Holy Ghost," she writes to Carouge, in the first days of May, "and say the *Veni Creator.* Above all things, let us all pray much and do you pray particularly for me. I wish you to offer a Communion each day for the King, Charles Albert, and one for the welfare of France and also to say the *Veni Creator* or the Rosary daily for these intentions." On August 16 she again says: "I beg of you pray for me incessantly; I have the utmost confidence in the infinite goodness of God, but I am at this present moment in great perplexity." She writes to Turin: "Offer this house to our Lady and St. Joseph with more and more earnestness. They will protect it, but more than all our Divine Lord and Master will Himself

safeguard it. We often pray for the King and his advisers, and I hope you do so likewise."

Madame d'Houet thought that the Superior of Turin showed, at this particular epoch, a somewhat too eager desire for the patronage of influential personages. She advised her to moderate this wish as savouring too much of a worldly spirit, and wrote: "Let us place our confidence in God, my dear Mother: He is our best friend and knows better than we do what is for our advantage".

The convent at Paris following in the footsteps of all the other foundations, began in extreme poverty. The religious who had to bear these hardships accepted them joyfully, for such conditions, we are told, are always softened and sweetened by the special blessings which accompany the practice of holy poverty. The boarding-school was opened in October, 1848, and Madame d'Houet herself saw to the material well-being and comfort of the pupils. But her attention was mainly directed to what is far more important and far-reaching, namely their training and the formation of their characters. She planned all that bore on this with that wise forethought which deems nothing trifling or unimportant. In the early days at Paris the pupils were few in number; during free time the young religious were therefore able to reproduce in their daily life the sweet Home of Nazareth, and experienced ineffable joy in sweeping the rooms, helping in the kitchen, making the fires, and cleaning the lamps. Then the venerable Mother used to assemble them twice a week to explain the rules. Those who took part in these conferences bore witness that she led her nuns with great sweetness; she would have them take up the yoke of Christ from love and not from compulsion and

instructed them in the religious spirit as one inspired. Each Sister would withdraw from these meetings, feeling her weakness, regretting her faults and filled with courageous resolve to practise her holy rules more exactly. While the venerable Foundress was thus actively engaged she was a prey to constant and ever increasing bodily sufferings. We find in a letter dated October 2, 1847, that for three months she had been troubled with an acute bronchial affection, and the fatigues and sufferings of the following year must have contributed materially to the breaking up of her health. Towards the end of November, 1848, she fell so seriously ill that she had to receive the last Sacraments. It was midday, and the community were on their way to the refectory when all at once one of the lay Sisters overtook them and said aloud: "Come quickly to our Mother, she is going to receive the last Sacraments". One can picture their grief and consternation at the unexpected announcement. Those who were carrying the frugal meal laid it down and all hastened to the holy woman's room. Whilst they prayed and wept around her she received with composure and resignation—the reflex of her daily life—the consolations which holy Church gives to her children when nearing eternity. Then all withdrew to the chapel forgetful, in their grief, of their food. At three o'clock one of the mothers interrupted their prayers and reminded them that they had taken no dinner. In the meantime the soup tureen and dish of beans had remained in the courtyard where they had been hurriedly left at noon. So overcome were the religious with sorrow that no effort was made to heat the food, which was by this time covered with the falling snow. They sat down and partook of their simple meal just as it was. That evening at recreation,

although all were sad at heart, they tried to be cheerful. Suddenly good Sister Delphine, who usually attended Madame d'Houet, entered the community room. She had been sent by the venerable Mother with a message which she delivered in a tone of great respect: "Our Mother bids me tell you that our Lord is not pleased with you, because you are not submissive to His will and are giving way to sorrow. She wishes you to kneel down and beg His pardon, and tell Him you ask only the accomplishment of His will." They obeyed and in this act of submission to God they found hope and comfort. From that moment the invalid began to rally. The next day Dr. Recamier, with anxiety depicted on his features, came to pay his second visit. "How is Reverend Mother?" he asked on entering the house. "Better," was the reply, "thanks to your good remedies." "Thanks to God, Mother," was the answer of this eminent physician, imbued as he was with the spirit of faith, "medical skill has had no part in it."

Madame d'Houet recovered, but her convalescence was long and tedious. We see by a letter of hers, written on December 7, that she was still subject each evening to a return of feverish symptoms. The alarm caused by her illness and the joyful news of her recovery were soon communicated to the houses of her Society. On New Year's Day her daughters of Carouge expressed their feelings in a little composition illuminated with an allegorical design. In her usual courteous manner, Madame d'Houet wrote to them: "How much I thank you for your sweet and beautiful New Year's Gift. The young and vigorous vine draws all its strength from the poor old elm on which it leans. Your 'Bears' made us laugh."

On the first page was a beautiful design representing

a vine which was climbing for support up the trunk of a tall elm. The design surrounded the following words, which we refrain from attempting to translate:—

A Notre Mère.
Ainsi qu'à la vigne tremblante,
Le tronc d'un ormeau vigoureux
Offre appui contre la tourmente,
Secours pour monter vers les cieux;
De même, près de toi, ta famille nombreuse
Trouve, O Mère chérie, un appui protecteur,
Et sous tes douces lois, confiante et joyeuse,
Suit la route du vrai bonheur.

On the last page another design represented a bear coming out of his lair in a savage land. Above it on a scroll were the words: "At last, they have gone". Beneath were the following lines, which we also leave in the original:—

En regardant ces ours sortir de leur tanières
N'allez pas les juger tels qu'ils semblent aux yeux;
Sous cet air peu courtois cachant un cœur sincère
Ils expriment à leur manière,
Leur sentiments affectueux
Et tiennent à prouver que dans leur solitude
Ils songent a l'object de leur sollicitude.

The allegory scarcely appeals to us, but was, no doubt, intelligible at the time.

In March, 1849, although Madame d'Houet's health had decidedly improved, she was still weak and unfit for travelling. Nevertheless she crossed over to England in the early part of May and went to Gumley House, thence to Laurel Hill for a month, and returned to Paris in the middle of July.

In the course of the same year, 1849, cholera broke out in Paris and three persons in the house fell ill. Dr. Recamier, who was called in, diagnosed the symptoms of the fatal scourge. When he called the next morning and

hastened to the infirmary, to his surprise, the patients were out of danger. "What have you been doing, Reverend Mother?" he exclaimed. "I merely carried out your prescriptions," replied the venerable Mother. "But I have prescribed the same remedies in all other cases," said the doctor. "I have even spent whole nights by the bedsides of my poor patients without being able to save them. You must have been praying." "Oh, as to that," she replied, "we replaced one another during the night at the foot of our Lady's statue." He made no further remark, but when he had come downstairs and reached the ground floor, he stood before the statue of our Lady and saluting her said, in tones full of faith and emotion: "It is you, my good Mother, who have obtained this favour. It was worthy of you."

We saw that Madame d'Houet, in her special love for the poor, had made their need of instruction her principal motive for opening a house in Paris. After its foundation she began a school for them at some distance from the Rue de la Santé. These children were often very difficult to deal with, and though some improved under tuition, yet for the most part they came to school only when they could find no food elsewhere. There was not the slightest show on their part of appreciation or gratitude; on the contrary, they were disagreeable, coarse, and rude in their relations with the nuns. Madame d'Houet had in the end to give up the school, and seek out other ways of helping the poor. The cholera gave her her opportunity, for, as a result of the scourge, there were numerous destitute and helpless orphans—those objects of universal commiseration—thrown on the charity of Catholic France. She resolved to open an orphanage.

In September, 1849, she purchased from the Venerable Father Lieberman, Superior-General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a pleasantly situated property at Gentilly, a suburb within easy reach of Paris. She had two large buildings erected on either side of the river Bièvre, which ran through the grounds. One became an orphanage under the patronage of St. Joseph, and the other a boarding-school where, at a very modest figure, the children of the working class and of small tradespeople received an education suited to their position in life. Madame d'Houet had the heart of a mother for the orphan children, and caused them to be trained in habits of industry such as would enable them afterwards to gain a useful livelihood.

Trials which were never lacking to her seem to have weighed heavily upon her during the course of this same year. "Pray and get others to pray," she writes in April, 1849, "for I have more than one urgent need. Storm Heaven, but only ask as our Lord Himself asked in the garden of His agony. Pray like Him and with Him and ask the favours through the intercession of our good Superior-General and Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary."

On the one hand she was pressed to make new foundations while, on the other, for lack of subjects, she had to refuse the most promising openings. Her own weak state of health, too, was very trying, and the illness of several of her daughters caused her the gravest anxiety. About this time circumstances obliged her to close the convent at Menotey, and some unfriendly persons engaged her in a lawsuit.[1] In

[1] In the lawsuit alluded to, justice was on Madame d'Houet's side. We do not possess all the documents concerning the trans-

spite of these preoccupations and worries she visited Nice, Carouge, and England as usual. In the spirit of God's servants she accepted all her crosses with gentle resignation. She writes on this subject: "It seems clear that the cross is made for us and we for the cross. May God's will be accomplished by our little Society. In everything may He be blessed for all."

When Madame d'Houet considered it her duty, in defence of justice and truth, to act and to speak, she did not hesitate to do so. To act otherwise would be, she knew, rather an outcome of weakness and cowardice than of Christian humility and forbearance. The following instance is a proof of this. During one of her illnesses, while she was staying for a time at Carouge, she received disquieting news from Paris. What had happened was all the more distressing as it originated from a source whence she had reason to expect considerateness. The Society was once again the object of unjust accusations and, on this occasion from her bed of sickness, the Reverend Mother General dictated a letter to the Superior at Paris. We transcribe an tract from it:—

My dear Daughter,

I wish you to call on Monsieur Gaume[1] and to place in his hands a copy of the Constitutions which I send to you. I am ill and confined to my bed for the past week, otherwise I would have had the pleasure of presenting them myself. I now reply to the accusations made against us and which have been carried to the

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action, a few only being in our possession. She abstained in her delicate charity from referring to such matters unless necessity absolutely obliged her.

[1] Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of Paris, and charged with the supervision of religious communities there.

Archbishop. It is said that the Society is full of mystery. I beg to assure his Grace that there is no mystery nor shadow of mystery amongst us. We are accused of intrigues. Again there is no basis for this either. Our Sisters seldom leave the house. They do not go to the parlour unless absolutely obliged, and hear no news of the outside world. They are occupied with their own duties and spend most of their time with their pupils, taking recreation with them and never leaving them even during the night. On Sunday, when their ordinary duties are done, where are they found? You know as well as I do, my dear Mother—before the Blessed Sacrament—making the Stations of the Cross—kneeling round the altar of our Lady. None of our Sisters seek elsewhere either rest or distraction.

As to those who accuse us, let them prove their assertions. I myself wish that Monsieur Gaume, who is so capable of judging and so experienced in visiting religious houses, would visit our convent and inspect it in every detail. I assure him that he will find what I say to be true. . . .

In the year 1851 the Reverend Mother General visited England, but the state of her health prevented her from crossing to Ireland, as was her custom. The following year, 1852, brought her the sad news of the death of her friend and patron, Cardinal Castracane, who died at Rome, February 22. This venerable and eminent prince of the Church retained to the end of his life the sympathetic and benevolent interest which he had shown to Madame d'Houet and her Society in 1837. Each year she had the custom of writing to inform him of the development and works of the Society, and he was always good enough to reply in his own handwriting. At this time, too, three new foundations were made in England—Birkenhead, Salford, and Manchester. Some of the instructions written to the local Superiors of these convents will show the spirit the Foundress wished to see reigning in all her houses. "In beginning this house (Holt-Hill, Birkenhead) place it at once on a proper footing. I recommend

you often to speak of edifying subjects at recreation and to show great love for, and entire confidence in, your Superior-General and in all the members of the Society. Make it plain that you have the true religious spirit by living in perfect charity with all our Sisters and that you are full of love for all our convents. Speak with special esteem of the Paris House, where the Superiors of the Society reside. Inspire the community and even the children with the desire to visit it.[1] Believe me, if you follow out my suggestions, you will call down the blessing of God on yourselves and on the entire Society." "Explain to all," she wrote a little later, "that there is nothing exclusive in the spirit of the Society, and that we ought to show equal love for all our superiors and for all our houses. We should not be too wrapped up in the interests of the convent we happen to be in, nor in the Superior under whom we are for the time being placed. In the first place we ought to have a great love and respect for the Superior-General. Explain all this to our Sisters during the retreat, and if any postulants or novices do not take up this spirit they had better not stay.[2]

The successful work accomplished by the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Birkenhead and at Salford proves that these foundations were inspired by God. The letter of the Bishop of Salford, already quoted, is a precious token of this. The zealous Foundress was much consoled by the results achieved in these missionary houses, for she saw in them what was, humanly

[1] Madame d'Houet wished her daughters to love the "Mother House" at Paris, as children love their home. The religious troubles in France have necessitated the Superior-General's removing to Brussels. The Faithful Companions of Jesus still turn with reverent affection of the Paris convent now dismantled of all save its memories.

[2] 12 December, 1852.

speaking at least, an unhoped for realization of one of the principal ends of her Institute.[1] On May 11 in the following year, 1852, Monseigneur Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, came to bless the new chapel at Rue de la Santé. It formed part of a wing which Madame d'Houet had just erected, and beneath the high altar were placed the remains of a young Virgin-martyr, St. Faustina, obtained from Rome by the Bishop of Lausanne and Geneva, Monseigneur Massiley. On this occasion the venerated Foundress had the happy thought of establishing for the benefit of the pupils and others a pious association which she called the "Association of Charity," or the "Association of St. Faustina". We subjoin the rules which she drew up, and to which later on his Eminence Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, had the goodness to give his official approbation.

I. H. S.

Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum.

ASSOCIATION OF CHARITY, CALLED THE CONGREGATION OF ST. FAUSTINA.

This Association originated at Paris on July 2, 1853, and was organized by the Reverend Mother Marie Madeline Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houet, Superior-General of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Regulations.

The persons belonging to this Association shall take the resolution of never deliberately failing in charity. They shall also endeavour to prevent any persons over whom they have control from wounding charity. When breaches of charity occur in their presence

[1] Adelphi House, Salford, had soon a supplementary house in another quarter of Manchester. Its immediate aim was to serve the elementary schools of St. Augustine's Parish. Two day-schools were opened in this second convent. Adelphi House and Birkenhead opened boarding-schools for children of the middle classes. In both, these departments became flourishing.

between those over whom they have no control, they shall, by a discreet silence, show that they take no part in the conversation. If their silence becomes a subject of comment they can always say that they belong to an Association which obliges members to practise strict charity.

2

This charity is to be displayed in the following manner: Let the members abstain from speaking of the faults of those around them, father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and later on in life, of husband and children. Let them never allow anything detrimental to the character of another to be mentioned in their presence.

3

On the other hand, let them seek to make public the good qualities of their neighbour and all that is praiseworthy in his conduct. The members of this Association ought often to pray for one another, particularly for the grace of perseverance and the grace to be faithful to their obligations. They shall offer, at least once a year, or once every six months, Holy Communion in honour of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary for this intention. The following aspirations ought to be said daily:—

"Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may love Thee daily more and more.

"Heart of Mary, abode of charity, be our model."

After the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary let the Associates be especially devout to St. John, the disciple of love.

4

Before being admitted to membership there shall be a time of probation, and there shall be several grades of membership. Those who have passed through the different grades shall receive a medal bearing the words: "God is Charity". "Love one another."

5

The Feasts of the Association are:—

1. 11 May—Reception of the Relics of St. Faustina.
2. 2 July—Feast of the Visitation.
3. 27 December—Feast of St. John, disciple of love.

Signed and approved,

FRANÇOIS, *Archbishop of Paris.*

New crosses mark the year 1853. Such difficulties arose at Asti between the civil authorities and Madame d'Houet, that she determined to close the convent. In this painful business she acted with her usual tact and prudence. Writing to the Superior of Turin, she says; "We must not try to conceal the fact that we are leaving Asti. You had better tell people that we have come to an understanding with the authorities of the town and are closing the house."

Nor were matters running smoothly at Turin, and Madame d'Houet writes: "I wish you to consult the Archbishop, my dear daughter, and tell him that I am very anxious to keep on this house if possible, but I wish to do exactly what his Grace decides is for the best. Let us pray much, and remind our Lord that He alone is the Master and Father of this House at Turin." Nor were these her only trials. In England, especially at Somers Town and at Manchester, many unpleasantnesses occurred. In the midst of all these harassing events a note of confidence rings throughout her correspondence. She writes to one of her daughters:—

We must do our best and desire only the accomplishment of God's will. In all our trials let us place our trust in our Lord and in His holy Mother. Make a Novena to our "Lady of the Class" for my intentions.[1] We cannot calm these storms, except by prayer made with great confidence. Try to arrange for persons to replace one another before the Blessed Sacrament, from six in the morning till eight at night. Pray for one of our Sisters who has had a most peaceful, happy death, such as we too may hope for, but as Father Varin used to say: "One is very happy to be in this world, since one can suffer for God and gain merit". Farewell, my dear and

[1] A statue in the Gumley Study Hall to which Madam d'Houet had particular devotion and which is held in great veneration by her daughters.

very dear Mother Julia. May God bless you and give you the spirit of Jesus which is all he asks of this little Society.

Your letter, my dear Mother Julia, gave me much pain. It is written in so sad a strain. Courage then and confidence, my dearest daughter, and let us remember that we are Faithful Companions of Jesus. What do we find in His life from Bethlehem to Calvary? Again, let us often recall to mind what Father Sellier said to me when he decided that we were to begin the Society. In my astonishment I had exclaimed: "God will then do all Himself," and he replied, "Yes, He will do all Himself, but not in the way in which you think; for it is by the Cross and by humiliations and desertions that He will do it. Do you accept the means He chooses?" And I replied, "Yes, Father, I accept all that God has ordained for me". "Very well," he continued, "since you accept the means, the matter is then settled. All will take place according as I have told you." I accepted all on that occasion; and yet when these very three things, the cross, humiliation, and desertion are presented to me, I turn aside. One of my heaviest crosses is to know that you are giving way to sadness and that you are in bad health. It is certainly not my intention that our Sisters should want for anything, and their ordinary fare and clothing at Manchester must be the same as in our other houses. We shall make up for any deficit in their income. Let them at once purchase what is necessary for warmth and for the preservation of their health. If I am to believe Miss N.'s letter they will very soon have neither boarders nor day scholars. We must examine into matters calmly and in the presence of God. If we decide to give up the house we must keep the matter quiet. Mr. Cook is very privileged, no doubt, but what is most to be admired in him is the patience with which he bears the crosses that God sends him. As for Manchester, I think that we must do all that is necessary so that we may have no cause for self-reproach. If no pupils come to us this will be a sign of God's will.

These sad forebodings were not realized, but the stress of such a painful state of uncertainty did not tell any the less on the heart of the Superior-General.

In November of this year a disaster befell the convent at Tottenham. In full daylight, without any known cause, the house took fire. The flames originated

in the top story where no fire was lighted, and in a few hours the building was a mass of flames. "My dear daughters," the Foundress wrote on hearing the painful news, "what can I say, except that we must adore the designs of God and submit to them? Let us return thanks to Him that no one perished in the flames."

This house literally disappeared and soon after Hampstead also was closed. Neither of these establishments were self-supporting. The destruction of Tottenham was not the last visible cross to be laid upon the shoulders of the venerable Mother during the year. On December 17 a short illness carried off a young nun of great virtue and promise, Mother Véronique Bret, at the early age of twenty-three. "I have before me," Madame d'Houet wrote to Mother Julia, "a saintly young religious who, unless there be a miracle, cannot live. God requires no one. May His holy and adorable will be accomplished in all things."

In 1854 Madame d'Houet began for the first time a work to which she attached very great importance—the giving of retreats for the benefit of persons living in the world. The Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Sibour, gave his formal approbation, and Monsieur l'Abbé de la Bouillerie, then Vicar-General of the Archdiocese and, later on, Bishop of Carcassone, was appointed to give the exercises at the convent, Rue de la Santé. This eminent priest, from the time of the humble beginnings at the Rue de l'Ouest, had taken an interest in the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and especially in their new convent at Rue de la Santé. The Archbishop sent circulars to the Curés and ordered bills to be placed at the Church doors announcing this retreat. Notwithstanding these efforts only three persons presented themselves, and

these constituted the sole auditory of the gifted preacher. The retreats which followed were also poorly patronized. It was only when all idea of giving publicity to them was abandoned that persons flocked to the Paris convents for this purpose. Was this not another proof vouchsafed by the Lord and Master that the Faithful Companions of Jesus were not to succeed by human means? These gratuitous retreats were first given every three months; later on they were reduced to one yearly. Let it not be imagined that Madame d'Houet was in any way discouraged by the first apparent want of success. On the contrary she only bethought herself how to give a wider scope to these retreats which she knew to be so profitable, and which from the first had entered largely into her plan of promoting God's glory and the salvation of souls. Death did not permit her fully to realise her projects. Moreover the complete execution of them did not depend upon her efforts alone.

When the mild season returned she crossed over to England, where the Society was in sore need of her personal direction. She first visited Amiens and then announced her arrival in London in the following terms: "My dear Mother Julia, if nothing prevents me, I propose to leave Amiens on Monday, July 24, at 6 a.m. and hope to reach Somers Town that evening. I have a great longing to meet you, and to be once more among my dear and very dear daughters in England. If it is in any way possible, we must begin our retreat immediately, but if that be not feasible we must defer it until later. We shall have a great deal to say to one another." "Let us pray much," she says further on in this letter, "that all our crosses may turn to God's glory and the good of our souls." She remained in England to the end of September and visited the houses in the

Mount St. Joseph's College and Convent, Vaucluse, Richmond, Melbourne, Australia

Founded 1882

[*See p.* 360]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Genazzano, Kew, Melbourne, Australia

Founded 1889

[*See p.* 360]

North, making a long stay at Dee House, Chester, which had been founded in the February of that year.

Her return journey to France was a trying one. "I did not know whether I should ever reach Paris," she wrote, "I lost the train on Saturday, and on Monday, when I took the steamboat, a terrible storm was raging, I climbed up the gangway alone under very heavy rain, while Sister Delphine was gone to ask some one to help me. However, in spite of the dreadful weather, we arrived none the worse. So wet were my clothes and parcels that people thought I had fallen into the sea. Make a novena of thanksgiving to our Lady. May this, good Mother, help you and enlighten you to carry out God's will."

CHAPTER XVII.

FURTHER TRIALS. MADAME D'HOUET'S LAST VISIT TO ENGLAND.

1856 AND 1857.

THE three last years of Madame d'Houet's life were the most trying in her career, God willing that His Faithful Companion should be like Him, bound to the cross even unto death. The tribulations which befell her, coming sometimes one after the other, sometimes many together, cannot be over-estimated. As her physical infirmities increased, death deprived her one after another of valuable subjects, who were seemingly necessary for the carrying out of her work to God's glory and to the good of the Society. Nothing was lacking in her chalice of suffering. The friends on whom she had relied forsook her; contradiction and contempt became her daily bread.

Madame d'Houet's heart was not dead to the claims of family ties. Her affection for her own kith and kin had not been killed but purified and made holy. She went through a period of keen sorrow at the unexpected death of one of her grandsons, carried off when on the threshold of a brilliant career. What troubled her most was the salvation of his soul, most dear and most precious to her. During his fatal illness, she prayed and asked prayers for him on all sides; nor was God deaf to them, for to her great consolation the young man became per-

fectly resigned to God's will and died a holy and a happy death.[1]

A trial followed which affected her spiritual family. The house at Nantes had been passing for the past two years through a painful crisis, when the Bishop, up to then kind and paternal, began to treat the Society coldly. There is every reason to believe that reports spread by certain persons unfriendly to the nuns, influenced him and those immediately surrounding him. Other difficulties supervened, but the events are too recent to permit of their being discussed freely. Let it suffice to say, that the steps taken by the Foundress, on several occasions, to justify herself, were ineffectual, for the Bishop, misinformed in many ways, refused to listen to any explanation. At the end of three months and a half the situation became so intolerable that Madame d'Houet withdrew her religious from the Nantes Convent, and left it in charge of caretakers.

During this period of anxiety she used to write several times in each week to the Superior, to help, encourage, and console her. She invariably in these letters speaks with the deepest respect of the Bishop of the diocese, though so little friendly to her or her Society. On March 10, she writes: "Come, my dear Mother, have courage and confidence. Be brave!" Having given her certain necessary instructions, she goes on: "Always speak of the Bishop with the utmost respect. Recommend strongly the doing so to our mothers and sisters, and do look bright and cheerful." "I implore of you," she writes on March 28, "to be submissive to God's will

[1] She wrote to Mother Julia: "Make a novena to our Lady of the Class, for one very dear to me. I ask this as a personal favour. Add to this intention five very important ones and make the novena with great fervour."

and to let us have an end of these jeremiads." "Again," dear Mother Julia, "God in His love and mercy has, this year, bestowed upon us a large share of His cross. May he be for ever blessed and thanked." And further on, in the same letter : "Pray and ask for prayers for me. I have very heavy crosses which I want to carry in accordance with the holy will of God."

The rumour of the difficult position at Nantes soon became noised abroad, and the nuns heard the matter discussed freely by those who visited them. Madame d'Houet writing on March 31 gave them the following advice : "To those who refer to these unpleasant matters, you have simply to say that we never had any intention of giving offence to the Bishop, and that if he knew the real truth, he would not be displeased with us. Emphasize the fact that you always acted for the best and as your conscience dictated. Speak of these matters to persons who are interested in the Society, but say nothing to others and allow them to withdraw their children from our schools if they wish.

"If we seek only to do God's will, no matter what happens, we shall always be satisfied. Above all things, my dear Mother, I repeat, do not allow anyone to blame the Bishop. Assure people that you have nothing to urge against his decision, even though not in our favour. You know very well that it is not the Bishop who is against us. The opposition is permitted by God on account of the name we bear, which marks us as having to walk in the blood-stained footsteps of Jesus crucified. God wishes us to be steeped in humiliation and suffering, in order that we may not grow cold in His service. Let God act ; He knows what is for our best interests."

"My dear daughter," she writes on April 2 : "You must do your best, and when you make a mistake, not

be troubled. In important matters, it is better to delay acting for a day or so and to write to me, rather than risk doing anything I could not approve of". "It is not absolutely necessary to love sufferings," she says later on in the same letter, "but to be resigned to the will of God, in the spirit of Faith, and to be fully persuaded that all He permits is for the best. Never talk against the Bishop nor allow anyone else to do so. Say that he knows better than anyone else the sort of good he wishes to be done in his diocese. Remember that he represents Almighty God at Nantes. Say then that we approve of all his decisions, although they are so contrary to our interests there. We have confidence that in the long run God will make all things turn out for our greater good. We are the companions of Jesus, and with Him we must suffer. Let this be our reply to those who tell us that they feel for us."

The same accusations, which had been in circulation at Paris, were also believed at Nantes, above all, the oft repeated, but quite groundless ones, of mysterious doings and intriguing. Madame d'Houet refuted the charge once more, just as she had done years before. She asked of what intrigues her opponents could accuse her daughters in the present instance, since they kept silence, and since all ways of otherwise justifying their conduct were closed to them. "As to mysteries," she says, "we have nothing either to say or to hide." And she again paints a picture of the life of retirement and of prayer led by her nuns.

All attempts to obtain a hearing having failed, Madame d'Houet wrote to the Superior on June 25: "Unless a miracle happens, the Bishop will not go back on his word. I have thought the matter over as also the subject of your letter. I have confided all to the Sacred

Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and I have asked our good Mother and heavenly Superior-General, to arrange as she thinks best, and to obtain from her Divine Son, the grace of our being very obedient to Him and to Her." Madame d'Houet then gave her further directions, and added: "Remind our Lady every day that she is Superior-General of this Society, and that we wish to be obedient to her in all things". After a few days of further delay, the Superior of Nantes, having made a last but ineffectual appeal to the Bishop, in accordance with the order of the venerable Foundress, left Nantes for Paris. The struggle had lasted many months. A few of the pupils at the Nantes convent, loyal above the rest and devoted to the Society, were transferred to the boarding-school at Rue de la Santé.

In July, 1856, Madame d'Houet came for the last time to England. She visited the north, but was unable to cross over to Ireland. She therefore summoned some of her daughters from Limerick to meet her at Lingdale House, near Birkenhead.[1] Her visible state of suffering and of utter prostration, coupled with the patience and humility with which she carried her heavy cross, filled the hearts of her religious with feelings of compassion and veneration. They realized only too plainly that they were gazing on her for the last time. She used what remained to her of strength to impress upon them the spirit of the Society, recalling to their minds its wonderful origin, due to our Lord alone, for she herself, as she kept repeating, "counted for nothing". In short, she omitted nothing which might fix on their minds God's aim in instituting the Society.

[1] Lingdale House, removed in 1863 to Upton Hall, near Birkenhead, where a first-class boarding-school, a day-school, and elementary school do very good work.

On her return to France she wrote to Mother Julia: "Present my respects to Bishop Morris;[1] tell him that his excellent advice served us in good stead. Our Angel Guardians visibly protected us. First of all, during our journey by train in England and France, we were alone in the compartment and our luggage was not examined at the Custom House. The station master led us through his private office and conducted us to the omnibus with great courtesy, placing us under the special care of those in charge. When we reached Paris, half an hour after midnight, it was so dark that we could not see where we were going, so a head official kindly helped to lead me, and tried to find a conveyance for us. When we reached the cab-stand, as there were no vehicles there, two men ran in all directions, but on returning told us there were none at any of the stands about. 'What will you do?' they asked. 'It is too late to get any sort of carriage.' Feverish as I was, and literally bathed in perspiration, it was impossible for me to walk. 'What shall we do?' I said to Sister Delphine. 'Let us pray to the holy Angels.' We had collected our thoughts for one or two minutes, when suddenly we heard the sound of carriage wheels, and the

[1] Bishop Morris, O.S.B., who, after his resignation of the Diocese of the Mauritius, became titular Bishop of Troy. He was for many years confessor at Gumley House, and a most devoted friend of the Society. He died, February 18, 1872, at Roehampton, where he was chaplain to the Sacred Heart Convent. He had the deepest veneration for Madame d'Houet and her Society, and a very special affection for Gumley House and its pupils. For many years he presented to the girl who was the head of the school a valuable gold medal. Bishop Morris was always very proud to relate that, on the occasion of Madame d'Houet's first visit to Bishop Griffiths to negotiate for the transfer of the Somers Town School to her Society, he was present at the audience.

men running out, engaged the vehicle. When the driver understood that he had to go six miles he objected, but the railway guards, really concerned for us, finally prevailed upon him to take us. I forgot to say that the letter announcing our arrival at eleven at night had not yet reached its destination; so we were not even expected at the convent."

This year, 1856, brought the venerated Mother a few consolations and also an additional responsibility, a new convent at Bruff near Limerick. This foundation the Society owes to the zeal and kindness of a very devoted friend, the Rev. Dr. Cussen, the parish priest. It was not given to the Foundress to witness here below the progress of this house which has become a most flourishing boarding school for children of the middle class. A good day-school is also attached to the convent and the nuns have taken charge of the parish schools.

The tragic death of Monseigneur Sibour,[1] Archbishop of Paris, on January 3, 1857, was so keenly felt by the venerable Foundress, already enfeebled by disease and suffering, that it almost caused her death. The convent in Paris lost in him not only a protector but a staunch and loyal friend. Many efforts had been made to prejudice him against the Faithful Companions of Jesus and to induce him to take measures unfavourable to their interests, but always in vain. Would his successor be in like manner their friend and patron? It was God's secret, and in God alone did the venerable Foundress place her trust. She did well. His Eminence Cardinal Morlot was even more favourably disposed towards the Society than his predecessor. On the oc-

[1] He was stabbed in church, during a procession, by a fallen priest.

casion of his first visit he showed himself at the outset grave and reserved ; and from his conversation it was obvious that he was not entirely unaffected by the reports which Madame d'Houet well knew had reached his ears. He cast scrutinizing glances around him ; but little by little coldness and reserve gave place to satisfaction and benevolent interest. The results of his own observation had triumphed over prejudice. Before he left the convent he made the holy woman understand that, having seen and judged for himself, he intended to be a Father to the Society. He proved himself such, and always showed the liveliest concern in the account she gave him of the good done by her convents in England. "Pray continue, my dear Mother," he said, one day when she gave him particulars. "You are, it seems, all-powerful in that country." "All our strength lies in our Bishops," was her happy reply.

Madame d'Houet understood the help our Lord had given her in the person of this prince of the Church. Henceforth she went to him in her difficulties and kept him *au courant*, either by word of mouth or by writing, of all that concerned the Society, its origin, its end, and its works. She always found support and comfort in his wise direction, sincere sympathy, and hearty encouragement. The Cardinal invariably received her as an honoured guest, and granted her long and gracious audiences.

On July 22, the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, the pupils of Paris celebrated, for the last time, the name-day of the venerable Foundress. Her deplorable state of health and extreme weakness prevented the giving of the usual concert, but the children expressed their filial sentiments in an affectionate dialogue. After they had sung their festal verses she, as usual, examined with

addressed to those responsible for the training of the children impress, because of the enlightened wisdom they showed, far in advance of her times. She sixty years ago suggested several methods and means brought forward in modern books of pedagogy, as discoveries of the present century. We often took the children to our venerated Mother in these last years of her life, so that they too might enjoy the privilege of hearing her speak in the sweet and holy strain natural to her. She used to help us in the difficulties which sometimes arise in the management of individual characters. To encourage a wayward child she would ask her to recite a poem, to read a passage from a book or one of her own essays. It would indeed be endless were we to give illustrations of the active part which she took in our work with the children. One instance I must give. A troublesome child in my charge had had a blister applied to her arm, but would not allow the arm to be touched afterwards. When Notre Mère was told she herself dressed it for several days, until the wilful little patient had become more docile and was ready to be treated by the infirmarian."

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (Our Lady of the Angels), Benalla, Melbourne, Australia

Founded 1900

[See p. 360]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (St. Mary's), Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia

Founded 1911

[See p. 361]

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAME D'HOUET'S LAST ILLNESS. HER DEATH AND BURIAL.

The anxiety felt for some years previously about Madame d'Houet's health notably increased in January, 1858. The severity of the winter tried her already worn out constitution, while fits of continuous coughing, with difficulty of breathing consequent on heart disease and asthma, were well grounded causes of alarm. Writing of this period with *naïve* simplicity and tender reverence, one of her spiritual daughters says :—

"This time last year the tragic death of the venerable Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Sibour, caused our Mother deep sorrow. In the course of that year, she lost many valuable subjects. Four young nuns of remarkable talent and virtue and several excellent lay-sisters had died. From all the houses, she heard of the death or serious illness of some of her daughters, amongst whom were three local superiors. Never had so many trials of this nature fallen upon her simultaneously. Nor was this the only sorrow that filled our Mother's heart, though charity bids us draw a veil over the most trying ones. We think it hardly possible for anyone to have suffered more or to have had a heart more cruelly torn than in 1858 was that of Marie Madeleine de Bonnault d'Houet whom our Lord had chosen to be His Faithful Companion. Under every cross her courage and energy, the outcome in her case

of self-discipline and conformity to God's will, upheld our venerated Mother. Bodily sufferings, fatigue, serious mental pre-occupation, nothing ever made her pass over the smallest observance of religious life, the least important devotion. She was accessible to all, and every day, at every hour of the day, always at the beck and call of her daughters who rightly saw in her the true model of religious superiors—a servant of the servants of God. Once she granted us nearly three hours' recreation, feeling, I am sure, that it was to be her last act of indulgence to us. But what a recreation that was—the listening to the outpouring of a heart on fire and all but consumed by the love of God and of this dear Society which it was her good fortune to have formed and ruled. This happened on Shrove Tuesday of the year 1858. The pupils had invited the community to assist at their carnival rejoicing. Notre Mère permitted the principal mistresses to do so, and profiting by the occasion explained to us what our spirit ought to be. We ought to lend ourselves to these innocent pleasures, when the doing so may be useful to the children, but we may never seek in them personal gratification and distraction. Our aim should be to unite the spirit of recollection and retirement with that of active devotedness. I wish I could paint even a faint picture of the holy conversation which occupied the precious hours of that last Shrove-tide recreation. The time passed all too quickly, in the company of our holy Mother, at whose words our hearts glowed within us. Alas! we shall never more enjoy that happiness. We have said that the trials which had filled and closed the preceding year continued during the first months of 1858. A pupil died in the Paris house and then the pupils' first mistress fell dangerously ill. The Sister

who recovered attributed her cure to our venerated Mother, who, when her illness was at its height, visited her and blessed her saying: "May our Lord Himself be your physician". That same evening Dr. Gendrin, who was visiting his patient twice a day, exclaimed in his joy and surprise: "At last, we have saved her". Next, our Mother's first assistant fell ill of a contagious fever, so that during the weeks immediately preceding her death, Madame d'Houet herself was obliged to see to business, to reply to questions, and to decide all important matters. Despite her sufferings, she entered into all details with her usual clearness of mind and well balanced judgment. The pain she was enduring was intense, yet no word of complaint escaped her. She had heart disease, asthma, and bronchitis, and the several remedies applied but added to her sufferings. Only a part of what she went through will ever be known; for a delicate reserve and a spirit of mortification made her conceal all she could, up to the very last. She never allowed anyone to wait upon her and forbade the Sister who was usually present when she herself dressed a wound on her leg, to inform her daughters of the agony she was in. She thought only of sparing them sorrow. As a matter of fact, her death, when it came, was as much a shock to her daughters of Paris as to those at a distance. Yet she herself knew long before that her last hour was approaching. For two or three years this thought must have been ever present to her mind. Death had no terror for her. Her only fear was that she might not be well prepared. For the future of the Society she founded, she was without uneasiness. "It is not my work," she used to say, "it is God's work and He will know how to uphold it, if such be His Holy will. No one was less fitted to begin it and to carry it on than

I was, and it is time that I go, for when a Superior-General is always ill, as I now am, many things suffer." This feeling, inspired by her humility, she had more than once expressed to our Mothers whom she begged at once to relieve her from the burden of the Generalship and to elect her successor. One day the doctor was insisting in the presence of several members of the community that she required rest and that she was no longer in a fit state to bear fatigue. "Yes, tell them that, Doctor," she interrupted, "I have been impressing it upon them for a long time, but they will not believe me." Whilst concealing her sufferings, as far as possible, from her religious, from fear of making them unhappy, she confided everything to our chaplain, M. Georgelin, not to complain of a truth but to receive spiritual comfort and the encouragement willed by God. She would say: "I never could have thought it possible for anyone to suffer so much. Oh, what power God has to punish us!" Her only exclamation in her most violent paroxysms of pain was: "My God, my good Master, have pity on me!" She never prayed to be released from her sufferings, and she begged that others would not pray for the healing of her body. "Do not ask for my cure," she said, "I only want the accomplishment of God's will. I should be sorry indeed to wish for more than that." One day after telling our devoted chaplain that she was suffering more than usual, and on his replying: "This is an excellent Purgatory for you," "Oh, what is it after all," she broke out in her humility: "I well deserve a great deal more than I have to bear now". She felt so much difficulty in breathing that she found it impossible to remain in a lying posture. Still every night, in the spirit of the rule, she made an effort to go to bed, though she could seldom remain there long.

When the end drew near she often spent days and nights in her arm-chair. As long as she could, she used to go to the chapel to receive Holy Communion, though even the short distance she had to walk was very exhausting. When she felt extremely weak, she used to ask the Sister to bring her a little drink soon after she had communicated, but when it was offered she usually gently refused. Later on in the day she used to keep repeating: "Oh! how true are our Lord's words: 'My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed'. He who comes to me shall never thirst. Come to me and I will refresh you." The time soon came when she was deprived of even this consolation. From the first days of March she was unable to leave her room or to fast. The Feast of St. Joseph approached, and she longed to communicate on that day, but did not consider herself sufficiently ill to receive the Viaticum. She reminded the chaplain that on that day a year before, he had brought her Holy Communion a little after midnight. He replied that he would gladly do so again. She hoped to die on March 19 and asked St. Joseph to obtain this grace for her, if it were God's holy will. "What a beautiful day it would have been to go to heaven," she remarked to Father Georgelin after the feast was over: "I think St. Joseph must have forgotten me." "There is still the Octave," he replied by way of consoling her. She clung to these words as to a sweet hope. "It is not I, Father, it is you," she said, "who have fixed the Octave-day." At the end of the month. Mdlle. Adèle Bougue came to Paris. She had not been told of the venerated Mother's condition. It will be remembered that she was the old pupil who had been left in charge of the house at Bourges, after the withdrawal of the community, and who was watching

over the interests of the Society there. Madame d'Houet felt a great affection for her which she returned deeply and lovingly. The holy woman well knew how Mdlle. Adèle would grieve on hearing of the imminent danger in which she was, and it was only by degrees that she allowed this child of her heart to foresee the loss she was so soon to undergo. For twenty years the chapel at Bourges had been empty, and the furniture having been transported to new foundations, only the four bare walls remained. Nothing presaged a favourable change in the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities. Attempts had been made from time to time to come to a better understanding, but all in vain, for the Society had very declared opponents in Bourges. It was even rumoured that the Archbishop, His Eminence Cardinal Dupont, who had succeeded Monseigneur Villette, had promised certain members of his chapter never to recall the Faithful Companions of Jesus to Bourges, though he himself personally was not against them. The furniture of a chapel, comprising an altar and church benches, happened just then to be advertised for sale at a low figure. Mdlle. Adèle Bougue asked the venerated Mother's permission to make the purchase. "Yes," was the reply, "you may buy them." Then she added: "In less than two years after my death the house at Bourges will be reopened". She uttered these words as if absorbed in her own thoughts, and without looking at Mdlle. Bougue or at any of those present. She continued, in the same rapt and abstracted manner, to speak of several other matters concerning the temporal affairs of the Society, and all she said about the future in due time came to pass. Mdlle. Bougue, on her return to Bourges, bought the altar and benches, and placed them in the chapel. Everybody more or less ridiculed her action, but never-

theless Madame d'Houet's prediction was fulfilled, as we shall see later on.

On March 24, though danger was not yet imminent, Madame d'Houet received Extreme Unction and the Holy Viaticum. She was seated in her arm-chair which she never now left, and during the ceremony her strong faith and sweet simplicity touched the hearts of all present. In death, as in life, she was hidden with Christ in God. It was only when she believed herself to be alone that she gave free vent to the ardour which filled her soul, by kissing her crucifix and gazing in love and respect on the statue of our Lady. Sometimes she would break forth into such expressions as: "O precious cross of my Saviour Jesus! My good Master have mercy on me." Or, addressing herself to the Blessed Virgin: "Comforter of the afflicted, Queen of Martyrs, Holy Mary! My good Mother, ask your dear Son to forgive me my sins and beg him to grant me mercy." We owe these details to the Sister who usually attended her. Often the holy woman did not perceive, or perhaps forgot, the presence of the Sister. One day the latter saw her raise her eyes to the crucifix, and then to the statue of our Lady, and heard her repeat these words: "I rejoiced when it was said to me that I should go into the house of the Lord". Then, remembering the presence of the Sister, she entreated her to say nothing to her daughters. It was on one of these occasions that she strictly forbade her to let them know how much she suffered. Her motherly heart was anxious to spare them this pain. "It will grieve them too much," she said gently.

Her humility and refinement of feeling made her accept, with deep thankfulness, the most trivial services. What appears extraordinary is, that through inadver-

tence and want of thought on the part of her attendants, the dear and venerated invalid's actual wants were sometimes overlooked, for now and again the food brought to her was unsuitable or unpalatable. But far from uttering words of complaint, she took whatever was served without remark and forbade the Sister to make any remark. She instructed this same Sister, when she went to the kitchen for her meals, not to appear in a hurry or show impatience if she were not attended to immediately. "The poor," she would say, "never complain of being left standing at the door." On the other hand, if anything appetizing or any delicacy were given her, she usually would not so much as taste it, bidding the Sister take it to the sick in the infirmary. Up to the last she concerned herself about the invalids of the house with a real mother's affection. Every morning she made minute inquiries about them and forgot her own sufferings in her desire to procure relief for them.

On March 25 Madame d'Houet felt better, and her daughters' hopes again rose. She herself desired to die on the 26th, the Octave-day of St. Joseph's Feast, which that year fell on the Feast of Our Lady's Sorrows. But she dreaded the least appearance of want of conformity to the Divine will, and said to Father Georgelin: "I do not know if I dare ask for this favour". He told her that she could do so conditionally. Then she asked him to beg the prayers of the community, of the pupils of Paris, and of the orphans of Gentilly for the same intention without specifying what it was. But this last hope also failed. Then she only remarked: "Now, it will be when God wills".

On Palm Sunday, March 28, she passed a very restless and painful night, and thought her last hour had

come. At half-past four in the morning she asked for the chaplain and some of the community, and insisted before them all, at this solemn moment, which she thought was to be her last, that she was to be considered of no account in the foundation of the Society, and that all she had written in her memoirs was literally true. "After my death," she said, "they may do so as they please with my writings; they may serve only to make us ridiculed; nevertheless, what I have set down in them is all perfectly true." Wishing to renew her declaration in a more solemn manner, she begged all present to say the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, as they had the custom of doing before actions of moment. Then, making the sign of the Cross, she said, in a voice loud enough to be well heard at the farthest end of the room: "In presence of our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin, I declare that I am not to be considered of any importance in the foundation of this Society. I also beg of you," she continued, turning to the chaplain, "to remind our Sisters that I have committed very many faults in the direction of this Society and that I have great need of God's mercy."

Immediately after Mass one of her daughters brought her a piece of blessed palm. She received it with her habitual respect for all holy things, and was particularly touched by this dutiful attention. On the Monday morning she was somewhat better, but in the evening her sufferings were redoubled. "She drew a conclusion which at first astonished me," says Father Georgelin, "namely, that one is happy in nothing so much as in being able to save souls." She had said to me some days before: "How can one occupy oneself with anything but the salvation of souls". This time she added: "One realizes this more fully in time of suffering, for suffering

makes one understand better the misfortune of a soul condemned to eternal pain. Oh! the loss of one soul! what a terrible misfortune! And if I should be lost! For who has corresponded with God's grace less faithfully than I have?" Then she recalled the sad examples of people who had begun well but in the end had been lost. I told her to oppose Christian hope to these thoughts: "Yes, most certainly," she replied in a tone which was surely one of steadfast trust: "but so much ingratitude and infidelity, side by side with such graces! I think there is no one to whom our Lord has shown more love than He has to me." The Tuesday and Wednesday in that Holy Week were for her days of continuous suffering but without apparent change in her state. I used to tell her that it was an excellent way of celebrating Passion-tide. "Yes, if only I knew how to profit by my sufferings," was her reply. "I doubt myself," said the good priest, "if it were possible for anyone to correspond more perfectly to grace than she was doing."

At the end of the preceding week, by order of the holy Foundress, the principal Mothers of the Society had been summoned by telegram to Paris, as she wished to meet them once more before the end. The Superiors of nearly all the houses were therefore assembled at her bedside. The dear Mother's state of excessive weakness was such that she was unable to speak to them during the first days of Holy Week. This was a great sorrow to her. "It will be very painful for our Sisters," she remarked, "to be obliged to leave Paris without my having spoken to them." However, God lent her the necessary strength to give them this last consolation. On Holy Thursday, April 1, the thirty-eighth anniversary of the foundation of the Society, she felt so

much better that she thought she would be able to assist at Mass on Easter Sunday. She assembled the community and reminded them that in the Society this day ought always to be one of great solemnity and fervour, one on which they should especially call to mind the spirit of their Institute, uniting themselves to Mary and the Holy Women at the foot of the cross. Then she asked them to hand her a notebook and looked out a special passage which she had read aloud. It was an extract in which she recounts how crosses, humiliations, and trials of all kinds were indicated to her, as the means God would make use of to preserve the Society in its first fervour, and how, after a moment's hesitation, she had resolved to enter upon this painful path. She then told one of the Mothers to stand up and to renew aloud, in the name of all, this solemn acceptance, and thereafter to preserve the memory of it more in their hearts than on paper. Next day, Good Friday, she again called the Mothers and recommended them to take the resolution to observe their holy rules more and more faithfully, and above all to cherish the spirit of them. She insisted with earnestness on certain points, such as the exact observance of silence, the avoiding of particular friendships and unnecessary visits. These recommendations, which she had so often repeated by word of mouth and by writing, are in a measure her last will and testament, and a precious heirloom which she has bequeathed to her daughters. We find this very idea expressed in her own writing.

"My dear daughters,—Receive with your customary kindness this last testimony of love from one whom, in spite of her unworthiness, God has deigned to make use of in order to guide you and to take His place as your Superior. Be exact in the observance of all our

holy rules and of all our exercises of piety, and never omit any of them, unless under the greatest pressure. Keep silence very exactly, for it will preserve you from contracting particular friendships among yourselves or with your pupils. If a member of the community persists in neglecting to keep her rule of silence, she must be placed where occasions for speaking will not occur. Do not go to the parlour without necessity or without your Superior's permission. Forgive me, my dear daughters, for all the bad example which I have given you and have the charity to pray for me.

(Signed) "BONNAULT D'HOUET,
"*Superior-General.*"

As good children ponder lovingly the *novissima verba* of a beloved parent, so do the Faithful Companions of Jesus cherish these instructions which their Foundress and spiritual Mother bequeathed them.

To ensure the prayers which she solicited, Madame d'Houet had also written and signed the following :—

"Considering the manifold obligations of a Superior-General, I establish a regulation that after my death, in addition to the usual prayers ordered for a deceased member of the Society, there shall be offered by one of the Sisters in each community, a Communion for the repose of my soul every day, for a period of three years. The smaller communities can be helped in this duty by the more numerous ones.

(Signed) "BONNAULT D'HOUET,
"*Superior-General.*"

On March 31, 1858, she was able to give private interviews to several of the Superiors who had come to Paris, and who were unable to remain absent any longer from their communities. On Good Friday, she

sent back the Superior of Carouge, as she judged her presence necessary at her Convent in Switzerland. Whilst Mother Emilie Guers was travelling homewards, the venerated Mother evidently followed her closely in thought and in heart, for she said: "Our Lord takes care of Mother Emilie during her journey. He consoles her Himself and He prepares great happiness for her on her return to Switzerland, where she will be welcomed with many rejoicings." As a matter of fact the welcome given was all the more glad, as no one at Carouge suspected the loss which threatened the Society. It is not surprising that as a result of the conversations which the venerable Foundress had held during the past two days, she found herself exhausted by the Friday evening; but it was hoped that after rest she would regain a little strength. This was not to be. At midnight, on Holy Saturday, she seemed so near her end that the chaplain was summoned to say the prayers for the agonizing. Though very weak, and in extreme pain, she was perfectly conscious and followed all that was recited.

When she saw that nearly all those who could come were assembled around her, she pronounced in a gentle but most impressive tone of voice these words: "I ask of all our Sisters pardon for the bad example that I have given them". While the prayers were being said, the religious, though they controlled their sobs, were most of them unable to make the responses. However, it was soon clear that the last hour had not yet come and that, if this were the beginning of her agony, it would be a very prolonged one. At intervals she pronounced words, which, without the least tone of complaint, showed how great was her physical pain: "What sufferings, my God! Have mercy on me. May your holy will be done."

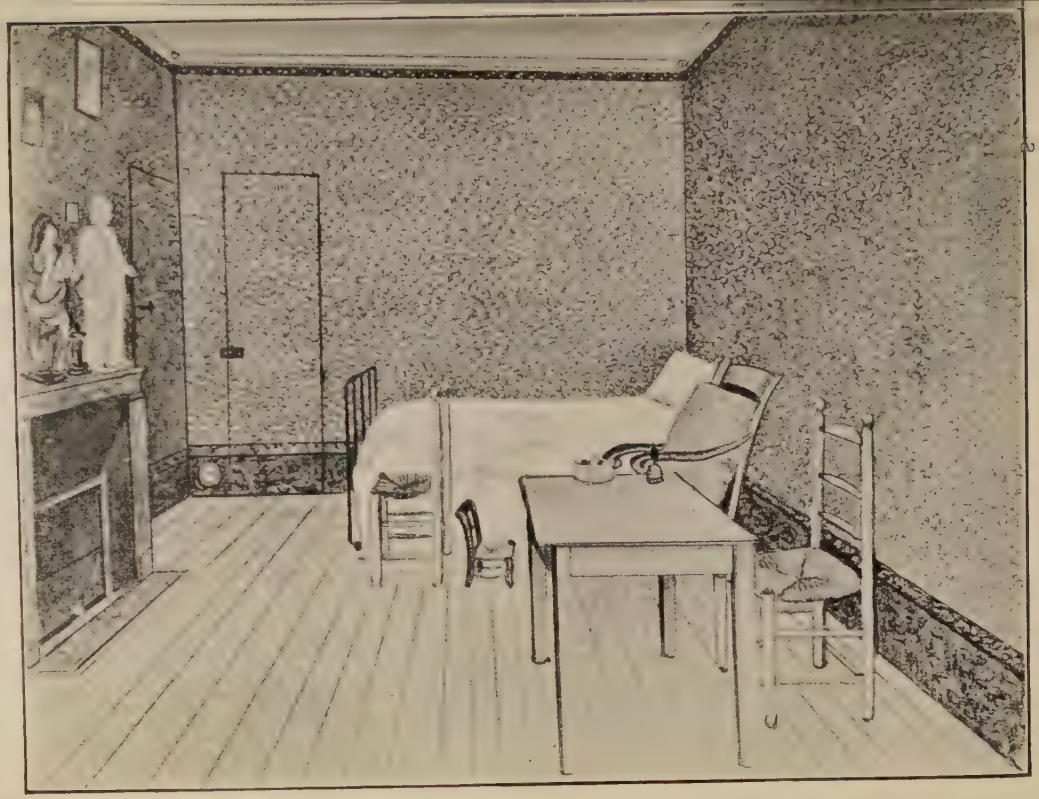
On Easter Sunday, in spite of her suffering and exhausted condition, her thoughts turned to the pupils. With that motherly instinct which never forsook her, she begged that the feast-day dinner should not be forgotten. In the afternoon Monsieur Leon de Bonnault, her grandson, visited her. It was a great pleasure to her to see him, and she conversed with him longer than one would have thought possible in her state of prostration. The young man withdrew, sorrowful, it is true, to find her so changed and suffering, but far from suspecting that the end was near. At ten that night she sent for Mother Julia Guillemet and Mother Stanislaus Lawless and uttered these words, the last which they were to hear from her lips : " Our Lord asks great purity of " (naming a religous order). " That virtue constitutes its strength and its glory ; but He asks even greater perfection on this point from us." Then she fell into a state of deep recollection for more than an hour. Notwithstanding that she had passed a very painful and distressing night, when a Sister came at four o'clock the next morning to replace those who had watched beside her during the night, she was already dressed and seated in her arm-chair. Thither the venerable invalid called the nuns before they withdrew and said with deep affection : " Good-bye, my dear Mother, good-bye, my dear Sister, we shall meet in eternity." Towards five o'clock, she said to the Sister who was with her, " Send word to our Mothers and Sisters to pray very much to-day ". Some moments later she asked if the Angelus had rung, and begged to be told when they heard the bell. Then she asked for her breakfast, and rose from her chair leaning on the Sister to approach the small table where she took her meals. But it was in vain, for though, in the spirit of the rule, she tried to take a little food, she

could no longer swallow. "It is all over," she said gently: "may God's will be done!" She tried to return to her arm-chair, but her strength failed and the Sister had to carry her back. The good Mother thanked her once more and added: "It is all over. I have finished my course." Then, exhausted with weakness she leant her head on the back of her arm-chair and placed her feet on a small foot-stool on which she usually knelt. She seemed, however, to fear that in granting her poor weak frame this momentary and slight ease, she might infringe on those *regulæ modestiæ*, which she cherished so much, and forthwith asked the Sister to tell her if there were anything contrary to the rules in this posture. She next asked to be told when the Mass bell rang and when the gong was struck for the consecration. At half past six, when the Sister told her that the Mass bell was ringing, the venerated Mother fixed her eyes on her crucifix with a look full of tenderness, and said: "Good example does a great deal of good". These were her last words. In pronouncing them, she made an effort to kneel, but the Sister prevented her, so she remained seated and made the Sign of the Cross. Then, slightly altering her position and placing her feet on the floor she joined her hands upon her breast as she was wont to do in prayer, and remained absorbed in God. When the gong for the consecration sounded, she raised her eyes to Heaven, but quickly let them again fall on the crucifix.

The dying Foundress had wished that the chaplain, Monsieur l'Abbé Georgelin, should be by her side at her last hour, and had often begged him to assist her with consoling words, until she had drawn her last breath. This he had promised to do and attached great importance to keeping his word. But it had not to be.

God willed in that momentous hour to be Himself all to His Faithful Companion. So little was it thought that the end was close at hand, that, after breakfast, the religious who had come from the distant houses had all with the exception of Mother Julia, set out with the pupils who were spending the Easter holidays at the convent to visit the shrine of Notre Dame des Victoires. They had taken with them offerings for Masses to be said for the beloved Mother, and had remained to assist at several of these said at once in the church. M. Georgelin likewise had also gone to Notre Dame des Victoires to deliver a message which the venerated Mother had entrusted to him, and unforeseen incidents delayed his return until the afternoon.

However, none of those in the house were long away from the sick room. They crept in noiselessly, from time to time, to pray beside their dying Mother. Though perfectly conscious, she made no movement, and her breathing, which was very faint, was easy. She had the appearance of one in a gentle sleep, and those watching mistook, what was really the holy tranquillity of the last hour of her life, for a happy and peaceful slumber. Towards nine o'clock, she moved gently, placing her right hand on her knee, the left hand resting in its first position. It was thus she remained until the end. On the doctor entering, feeling her pulse and asking her how she felt, Madame d'Houet did not reply ; she merely opened her eyes and smiled. Towards half past ten, the Sister who was kneeling beside her noticed that the lines on her countenance were gradually disappearing and that her breathing was becoming weaker. She summoned the community, of whom about ten gathered round the bed of death. There was no sobbing as on preceding occasions, no shedding



Room in which the Foundress Died, April 5, 1858

of tears other than those of joy. Silence, recollectedness, and prayer reigned in the room. The feeling experienced was one of veneration and awe as when an auspicious and solemn event is awaited. The Sisters placed a blessed candle in the hands of their saintly Mother and sprinkled her with holy water, as she had so often begged them to do. Then Mother Julia, kneeling close beside her, repeated the words she had so often herself uttered during life: "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my heart, my soul, and my life. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul to you in peace." By the movements of the dying Mother's lips, Mother Julia distinctly perceived that she was following the invocations. Having three times repeated the ejaculation, "May I die peacefully in your holy Company," Mother Julia pronounced the Holy Name of Jesus, and always believed, that at that instant, the soul of the venerable Foundress passed across the borderland which separates time from eternity. One of the Mothers, so placed as to behold her countenance very distinctly, remarked that as the Holy Name was uttered the holy Foundress's features were suffused with a joyous expression such as is seen on the countenance of one who unexpectedly meets a beloved friend. Gradually it gave place to the calm grave serenity of the departed.

Such was the death of Madame d'Houet, or rather may we not say, such was her entering into true life, into the abode of eternal rest and peace. Her passing had been without a struggle, without so much as a change in the religious posture she had preserved all that morning. Her body, although unsupported, remained erect, and the hand on her breast did not fall. This seemed

wonderful, and for three quarters of an hour it wa scarcely realized that she had passed away.

That same day, April 5, Monsieur l'Abbé Georgeli acquainted Cardinal Morlet, Archbishop of Paris, in th name of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, with the sa news. And on the morrow we received the following letter :—

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
EASTER TUESDAY, 1858.

DEAR MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ,

I was not even aware of the illness of the venerable Superior, and I learn that she is no more, before I so much as suspected that we were threatened with her loss. It is for me, as well as for her religious family, a real blow. I, too, had realized from the time of my first acquaintance with her the many virtues and capabilities of her privileged soul. But, as you so justly remark, her work upon earth was finished, and she has entered into the abode of rest, refreshment, and peace.

Assure those around you, her religious daughters, that I honour her memory, and that I pray for her and also for all those who are dear to her here below. I will offer the Holy Sacrifice for this intention to-morrow.

You will present my good wishes, full of regard and sympathy, to the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and beg them to remember me in their prayers.

(Signed) F. M. CARDINAL, *Archbishop of Paris.*

The community had the consolation of receiving a valued visit from the venerable Curé of Notre Dame des Victoires, M. Desgenettes. At the time of the venerated Mother's illness in 1846, they had recommended her to his prayers. "Your Mother will not die," he had answered, "she has still perhaps twenty years to live." In her last illness when, after her attack in January, 1858, she had a relapse, they had again sent to ask his prayers and those of the Archconfraternity. "Pray much," was his reply. As she grew worse the Sister

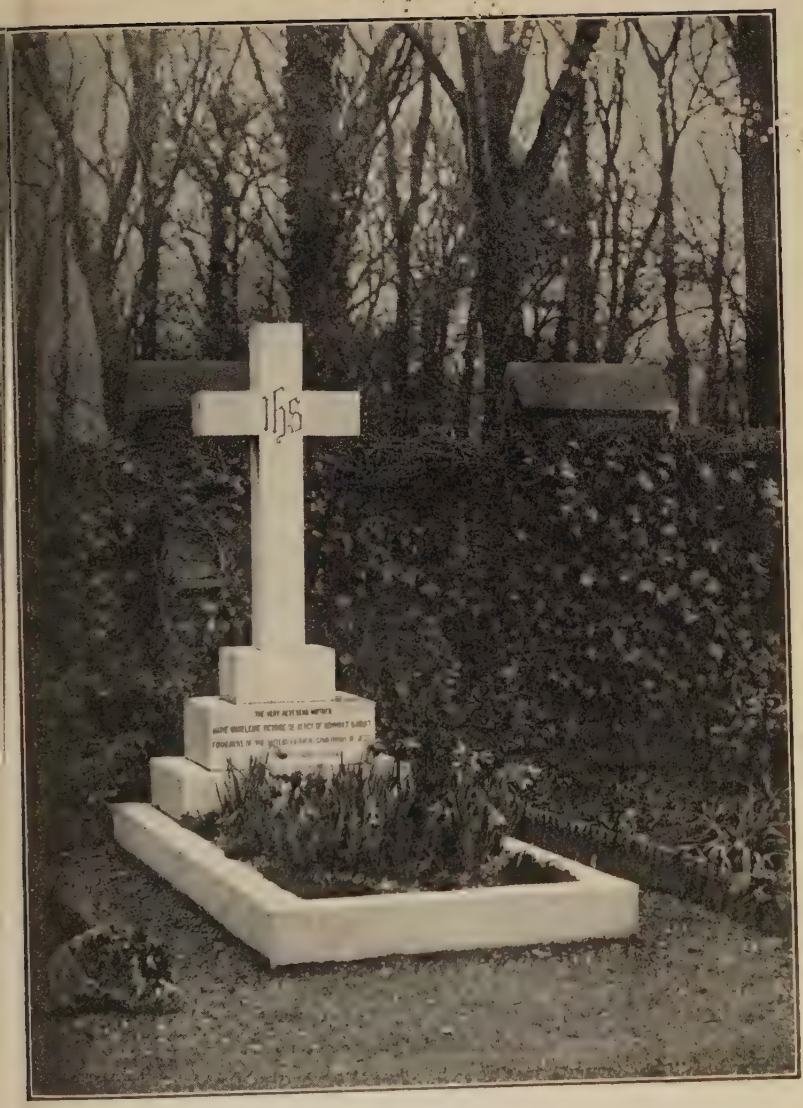
was again sent, and said with tears in her eyes: "Monsieur le Curé, Notre Mère is very ill". "These tears are a bad omen," he replied. Then putting himself into an attitude of prayer, he said after a moment's silence: "Nothing now remains but to pray". When he came to express his religious sympathy with her daughters: "I do not know," he remarked, "why your Mother died. Her work was not finished. Perhaps during her last years she has done so much, toiled so hard, suffered so keenly, that she has reached the sum total of her merits. If it be not so, our Lord has not revealed to me why He has withdrawn her from this world. Now that she is in Heaven, she will ensure for you the protection of Notre Dame des Victoires whom she so loved on earth."

The funeral took place on the Thursday in Easter week. Some months before her death the venerated Foundress had said that in similar circumstances, her daughters ought as much as possible to spare the pupils a grief which strictly speaking does not belong to them. And now, in their desire to enter into all her intentions the good nuns had the self-restraint and the moral courage to hide their own feelings from the pupils of Paris, and to throw themselves cheerfully into the holiday amusements. The pupils were informed of the Mother's death only on Wednesday evening, when the chapel had to be prepared and draped for the funeral service. Those who had gone home for the holidays were also communicated with and nearly all assembled to give a last testimony of their respect and affection to the venerated deceased.

On Thursday, April 8, at eight o'clock, the venerable Curé of St. Medard, M. l'Abbé Moreau, afterwards Canon of the Archdiocese, who had always shown an

affectionate interest in the convent at Rue de la Santé, came to celebrate Mass for the revered Foundress's soul. Whilst it was being said the clergy assembled for the funeral service. At nine o'clock Canon Lequex, who was charged by the Archbishop with the care of religious houses in the Archdiocese, came to officiate at the Requiem. He had seen Madame d'Houet but once, and only when she was already enfeebled by sickness. Nevertheless, after the Gospel, he preached a remarkable panegyric, applying to her the words of St. Paul, Hebrews xv. : "Remember your superiors, and considering their end, imitate their faith". He showed how this saintly woman, who could have led an easy and honoured life in the world, preferred one of poverty, abnegation, sacrifice, and devotedness, the whole course of which was marked by heavy and great tribulations. Her faith had supported her through the long years she had devoted to the glory of God and the good of souls. What must now be her recompense! Let those present imitate her faith and strive to merit such an end as hers.

The remains of Madame d'Houet were, according to her desire, borne to the small cemetery within the enclosure at Gentilly. The Curé awaited the cortège at the outskirts of the parish, with cross, banner, cantors and choir. The orphans wearing veils and bearing lighted tapers, as an escort of honour, followed her who had been their Mother to her last resting-place, and together with the clergy of Paris and the pupils of Rue de la Santé formed a long procession which moved through the village of Gentilly, to the tolling of the death knell from the parish turret and the chanting of the "Miserere". The whole population thronged the streets, showing deep respect and recollection. The body was taken to the chapel, the "De Profundis" sung, and the coffin was



Grave of the Foundress in the Cemetery of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, at Upton Hall, near Birkenhead, whither her Remains were removed from Paris, with the usual ceremonial laid down for the translation of a future Beata's body, on June 14, 1904

placed close to the home of her dearly loved orphan children, in a grave lined with flagstones joined together with Roman cement.[1] There, awaiting a glorious resurrection, repose the mortal remains of the pious servant of God, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houet, Foundress and First Superior-General of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

[1] Owing to the religious troubles in France and the suppression of the convents, the body of the venerable Foundress was, with due authorization of both the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of Paris, translated to England, June 12, 1904. It now rests in the private cemetery of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at their Convent, Upton Hall, near Birkenhead, Cheshire, where the English noviceship of the Society is established.

CHAPTER XIX.

MADAME D'HOUET'S VIRTUES.

The foregoing pages have been in substance a record of the good works and an illustration of the virtues of Madame d'Houet. Still, the subject demands further development. In undertaking this portion of the work the author is embarrassed by the quantity of interesting manuscript which he has before him, and on the other hand feels that he must both guard against repeating himself and avoid giving too copious data. Consequently, he omits many details and leaves to those who may write a fuller life of the Foundress the task of inserting much of what is here left unsaid.

Faith, as we have already remarked, was the keynote of all Madame d'Houet's actions. With her this Divine light supernaturalised every action, and its vividness in her soul adequately explains her characteristic manner of acting during the course of her exceptionally trying life. Like the just man in Holy Scripture she lived by faith. To view the events of life from any other stand-point had become, so to speak, an impossibility for her, for as the glorified spirits in Heaven see nothing but from God's point of view, so also in her measure did this faithful soul. The outcome of her lively faith was a most firm hope. All her trust was in God and in God alone. How many times, full of holy confidence, did she not rejoice that her Society had no human support and could count only upon God. "You

tell me," she writes, "that God only is in our favour; but that is quite sufficient, nay more than enough. It is better to have Him on our side than all the world besides."[1] "If our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother are for us, who can harm us?"[2] "Let us glory, as did St. Paul, in nothing save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us remember that the care He takes of us is greater than any we can ever take of ourselves."[3] "The God whom we serve is not a god of stone or wood. His power is infinite: He calls into being that which is not as easily as that which is, and the one and the other appear at His word."[4] "Let us ask our Divine Saviour and His Most Holy Mother to remember how weak we are and to deign themselves to do all. 'There is no one for us save thee, who art our Lord.' Let us often say this to Him."

The words "Courage and Confidence," which she held as a precious device from Father Varin, were continually on her lips. They had almost become her motto. "Courage and Confidence," she used to say, "but, above all, great confidence, lively confidence. Never allow the devil to weaken either of these virtues in your soul." "Come, courage and confidence, it will all turn out as we have hoped."[5] "Courage and confidence. God and His holy Mother will themselves do all. Yet more, they will reward us, as if we alone had done everything."

The thought of Heaven upheld her in her trials. But, side by side with this feeling of confidence, we can detect an under-current of salutary fear, hence her oft-repeated exclamation: "What happiness! what happiness, when we shall hear the word 'saved'!"

[1] January, 1843. [2] 1838. [3] January 16, 1845.
[4] January 29, 1845. [5] May 25, 1848.

Her unshaken confidence in the promises of God, together with the ineffable peace of soul which was its outcome, is the breath, from end to end, of her vast correspondence. "Let us pray with all our hearts till God, in His mercy, has received us into His eternal tabernacles. What joy to think that possibly the happy day is not far off!"[1] "Let us do our best here below to be good and fervent religious, and we shall be united for ever afterwards in Heaven—in that beautiful Heaven where our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a place for us."[2] "Only a little longer to wait, and then we shall be together in Heaven for evermore."[3] "Let us take courage; life is very short yet very precious, since by the crosses we bear here below, we are to gain Heaven —our heritage."[4] "Courage, my very dear daughter; time is short and the recompense is eternal."[5] "Dear Mother Julia, I beg of you, do not indulge in any sad thoughts, for Heaven is ours. Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother keep places for us there. Let us then be cheerful and contented in that thought."[6]

The light of faith lit up the fire of charity in her soul. Her special devotions to the Holy Trinity, to the adorable Humanity of our Lord, to His Sacred Heart, and to the Most Holy Sacrament, were but so many manifestations of a love both active and practical. She had engaged herself by vow to propagate devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. She kept her vow with fervour tempered by discretion. She made it a rule that the statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Virgin should occupy places of honour in the

[1] October 4, 1835.
[2] January 18, 1836.
[3] March 14, 1838.
[4] January 16, 1843.
[5] January 2, 1843.
[6] 1843.

chapels of all her convents. But her devotion consisted above all in the imitation of the virtues of Jesus and Mary. "Belong to God, my dear daughter, through the sweet and humble Heart of Jesus. Do not forget that it is by humility and meekness that we shall find the happiness and peace of the Lord." [1] "My beloved Sisters, it is my dearest wish that your hearts be united to the Heart of Jesus and that you walk faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord, not in sweetness and prosperity, but by carrying with Him your crosses in patience, in peace, and in charity. Courage, my dear daughters, the time is not far distant when we shall all be united in God for ever." [2] "I greet you all, my dearly loved Sisters, and I pray that the Divine Heart of Jesus may fill you each day with His graces and with His Divine love." [3]

Her piety was in the truest sense catholic nor had aught of exclusiveness or narrowness about it. She entered into the spirit of all the Feasts of the Church. She loved our Lord in every stage of His own life, and in all His Saints. She was, in particular, attracted towards those of His elect who were most intimately connected with His Sacred Person, Our Dear Lady, St. Joseph, St. Anne, the Holy Apostles, the Holy Women-Companions of Jesus—the Virgins, especially the Virgin Martyrs who "Follow Him whithersoever He goeth". Her devotion particularly inclined her towards those Saints who loved our Lord most tenderly and personally and who followed Him most closely, such as the Saints of the Society of Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Peter of Alcantara and St. Teresa, and it was our Lord she loved with loyal and filial affection in the person of His Vicar on earth. She used often to

[1] July 3, 1832. [2] 1832. [3] April 3, 1833.

repeat with fervour and enthusiasm St. Teresa's words: "Thank God, I am a daughter of Holy Church". "How much the Bishop's words pleased me," she wrote to Mother Julia on January 7, 1842, "tears came to my eyes, and yet I do not weep easily. Oh! yes, let us always be true daughters of the Church, our dear Mother."

And what shall we say of her love for that Society of which our Lord had made her, at the same time, the mother and the daughter. She saw in its foundation the hand of God alone: she recognized with respect, admiration, and gratitude, the unfailing blessing of His Divine protection of it: all her happiness was to live in membership with it, nay, her one fear, inspired by humility, lest she should not be found worthy to die in its bosom.

She had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin who had been given to her as the Superior and the Mother of her Society. She recommended her religious to have recourse to this powerful Mother in all their difficulties and doubts, in her quality of their first Superior; she assured them, in convincing words, that they would always feel how truly Mary was indeed their Superior and their Mother. This thought finds frequent expression in her correspondence. "This is what you must do," she writes in a time of great trial, at the opening of a new house: "each day, in company with Mother N—— and Sister N——, place yourself at the feet of the Blessed Virgin and say: "My beloved Mother, I can do nothing for this house neither can Notre Mère. I place it, therefore, in her name and in my own in your keeping. I beg you most Holy Virgin, our Mother, to accept and direct it and to call hither to it such persons as you yourself choose, that they may glorify your

Divine Son and honour you, my good Mother." She adds further on in the letter: "Have the Rosary said each day for my intention, by the novices and pupils. It is a mistake to worry. Remember that God permits our crosses, and He will, in His own good time, prescribe the remedy for all our ills. And then, is not the Holy Virgin the Superior-General of all our houses?"[1] I wish you to make in my name and in your own, a donation to the Blessed Virgin of all our English houses and of all those that we may establish in the future, and to beg our good Mother to take full charge and entire possession of them and everywhere to guide our Mothers and Sisters.[2] "Courage and confidence, my dear Sisters. Let us do our best to prove to God the sincere desire we have to be faithful to Him unto death, and if He wishes unto the death of the cross. Never forget that the most Holy Virgin is our Superior-General. In all our wants, let us approach this tender Mother with full confidence. She will provide for us."[3] One day, at Paris, she had been speaking of our Lady's title: "Superior of the Society". In closing the meeting she wished according to custom to ask her blessing; but the tenderness of her devotion overcame her to such an extent that she could barely utter the first words of the formula: "My good Mother, beg your dear Son"—tears choked further utterance, and after vainly struggling for some moments to master her feelings, she withdrew in silence amid general emotion. When she received a letter which, especially at Paris, occurred very frequently, she never broke the seal without asking our Lady's blessing and permission. She used to leave her seat and place the letters before her

[1] January 7, 1842. [2] June 28, 1844. [3] February, 1849.

picture or statue. Then having kissed the feet of our Lady and those of the Divine Child, she dealt with her correspondence, or if she happened to be in another room or if anything prevented her from rising, she took the medal of her beads, kissed it reverently and said a Hail Mary. She acted in the same way when she had to write a letter. She recollected herself for an instant to consult our Lady and said a Hail Mary before taking up her pen. She seldom omitted this practice, not even on occasions when the answer seemed obvious. Every day, no matter how overpowered she was with business, she said the entire Rosary nor ever omitted it even when, during her last illness, she had great difficulty in breathing. Her confessor then directed her to say the prayers mentally, which suggestion was a great comfort and relief to her. She had great confidence in the Rosary and invariably had recourse to it in the many crises through which the Society passed. When she visited Paris, before the foundation of the Rue de l'Ouest and of the Rue de la Santé existed, she always paid a long and fervent visit to the shrine of Notre Dame des Victoires. No sooner had her convent been established in Paris than she begged as a special favour the honour of looking after and washing the linen used at this favoured altar. She writes on one occasion: "I must tell you that I have obtained permission to wash and mend the linen used at the altar of our Lady of Victoires. I cannot express my joy." [1]

The proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception overwhelmed her with happiness. Usually so calm and self-possessed in her manifestations of piety, on this occasion she seemed incapable of restraining her

[1] October 13, 1847.

enthusiasm and devotion. She had in the past been ingenious in devising new means of honouring Mary Immaculate in her Society. Already the words, "O Mary, Conceived without Sin," shone in characters of gold over the façade of the house in the Rue de la Santé; already, "O Mary, Conceived without Sin," was repeated over and over again daily by each member of her Society. What could yet be done? This question the fervent daughter of Mary Immaculate was always asking herself. Some days before the feast in 1854 she assembled the community in Paris and directed them to commemorate the definition of the great dogma by uttering in response to the invocation: "Praise be to Jesus," which is the signal for rising, the words: "And blessed be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the ever Blessed Virgin". On the actual day of the feast a solemn procession took place for the first time, at the close of which the pupils approached two by two the feet of our Lady's statue and repeated in loud, distinct tones the words: "O Mary! I believe in my heart and I confess with my lips, thine Immaculate Conception." This public act of faith in the newly defined doctrine became a tradition in the house of Paris and was adopted by the other convents of the Society. On that memorable December 8, Madame d'Houet spoke but little, for she was overcome by feelings too deep and too sacred for utterance. Towards evening she said to one of her daughters: "I really believe that there are days when the Blessed Virgin makes her presence sensibly felt in the midst of those who are assembled to do her honour".

On the following July 2, Feast of the Visitation, she wrote to Mother Julia Guillemet: "I wish you to make a consecration of yourselves and of our Society, in your

own name and in mine, to the Blessed Virgin, our dearest Mother and Superior-General. You will publicly declare that all we have, our persons, our pupils, all belong to her. Place at her feet a casket, and let each one of our Mothers and Sisters approach and give a small coin as a tribute we offer her, in proof that she is our Mistress and our Mother. Compose a short prayer embodying this idea, and say it over in the chapel before all the community. Direct this to be done also at Liverpool, Birkenhead, and Manchester." This was by no means the first time that Madame d'Houet's filial and resourceful devotion devised a new way of honouring our Blessed Lady.

Madame d'Houet's love for our Lord and His Holy Mother was fed by her habit of constant prayer. She began the day by making a two hours' meditation and in addition she gave to prayer all time not absolutely taken up by the performance of her other duties. Every day, so long as her strength allowed her, she made what is known as the devotion of the "Holy Hour," which for her was from eleven to twelve at night. When by reason of her failing health this was no longer possible, she made the Stations of the Cross after night prayers. "Let us pray much," were her first words in every difficulty, and in every trial and danger. "We must pray much if we desire nothing but God's will. He will not forsake us, no matter how powerful our enemies may be."[1] "Be sure to recommend these matters to our good Master, and to His Holy Mother," she wrote on a critical occasion: "Remember we can do nothing without the help of prayer".[2] "Let us pray much, my dear Mother; it is the sure remedy in all trials, and never forget that

[1] 1835. [2] June 29, 1844.

the Blessed Virgin is our Superior and our loving Mother."[1] "Continue to pray much in order that in all things we may accomplish what God asks." "Let us pray a great deal. I hope that God will arrange everything for His greater glory and the salvation of our souls. Above all, if you wish that God should help us, do not distress yourself."[2] "Let us pray earnestly. God is our strength; and the Blessed Virgin is our Superior-General. This we must never forget."[3] "Take great care of all our Sisters, she wrote to one in authority, and pray well for them, for us all, and for me in particular. Prayer will make you all-powerful."

Madame d'Houet looked upon the interior spirit and upon punctuality in spiritual exercises as the essential means, not only for the sanctification of her religious daughters, but also, under God, for their success in their charges. "Fear nothing so much," she writes to a Superior, "as losing the interior spirit. Nothing will go well, believe me, if you do not possess it. Never omit your spiritual exercises, and see that our Sisters do not neglect theirs. When you are in chapel try to realise that you are with God. Speak to Him of your business, of your interests, but do not let these things absorb your mind during the time of prayer. I have found by experience that one does a great deal more by occupying oneself solely with God and His glory than by taking thought of earthly things."[4] "I recommend you, my dear Mother, to be exact in performing your spiritual exercises. See that all our Sisters make their hour's meditation, their two examinations of conscience, and their spiritual reading from the 'Christian Perfection'. I insist on these points." To another Superior

[1] April 26, 1845.
[2] July 27, 1853.
[3] 1850.
[4] July 31, 1839.

she writes: "You ask me to tell you something which may help you in your spiritual life. Here it is. Never under any pretext whatsoever cut short the spiritual exercises prescribed by the rule, nor your hour's uninterrupted meditation. Do not pay attention to the suggestions which the evil one may put into your mind about such and such things requiring your immediate attention. Resist the temptation, and, believe me, you will soon find a great improvement in yourself. If you are but faithful to what I tell you, you will get through more work than in any other way, because God will help you." "Before everything else keep yourself united to God. This will ensure your thinking and acting as you ought. May the Holy Spirit Himself be your guide."[1]

Little is known of the interior communications of Madame d'Houet with God. She revealed those only which directly affected the foundation of the Society. However, it is not difficult to conjecture their nature. During prayer she seemed lost in God. Her appearance and manner inspired with respect and veneration even the youngest and most thoughtless of the pupils. When she thought herself alone in the chapel, burning words of love escaped her, and on one occasion she was heard to cry out in thrilling accents: "O what love! My God, I adore you." The tone and accent with which these words were uttered made a lasting impression on the young religious who happened to hear her. One day the chaplain of the Carouge Convent was at the end of the chapel where Madame d'Houet, unaware of his presence, was praying. Suddenly he heard her say in a tone of fervid devotion which deeply moved him: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken my beloved

[1] February 16, 1847.

until she wishes herself to arise". Several persons remarked that at times her features lighted up with a heavenly expression, beautifying and transfiguring them. We may well believe that from the time when Almighty God began to draw her more specially to His service, she had received, without being aware of it, an extraordinary gift of prayer. When Father Varin first advised her to give herself to mental prayer, and she replied that she did not know how to meditate, we are told that he then asked her in what manner she prayed. On her reply, the tenor of which we can only infer from his answer, he said: "But that *is* meditation; I myself know no other method". While she was living at Amiens, and still a secular, she used to frequent the chapel of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. A pupil of their convent, who afterwards joined the Society, Mother Euphrasie Delaporte, remarked even then the recollected, fervent demeanour of the devout lady, and the heavenly expression that at times suffused her countenance. She relates that often when she knelt at the spot where Madame d'Houet had knelt, she found the Communion cloth moistened with tears. In the early years of the Society at Amiens, Madame d'Houet frequently passed several consecutive days in a small room close to the chapel, quite alone and so absorbed in immediate union with God as to be altogether forgetful of the need of food and other bodily wants. Her first companions did not dare to disturb this mysterious repose, although anxious on account of her protracted fasting. It was their custom to send Mother Julia Guillemet, then an artless child of thirteen or fourteen years of age, loved by the saintly Foundress on account of her candour and piety, to remind her of her bodily needs. The young girl, opening the door gently, would quietly

utter the word, "Mother". On hearing her voice, Madame d'Houet would raise her head, and the child then beheld her countenance illumed with a strange expression, not of earth, but of heaven. "Ah! it is you, Julie," she would say. "Come in, my child." And then she used to speak of God, pouring into the innocent, ingenuous soul, something of the light and the grace with which our Lord inundated her own. But Julie did not forget her errand. As soon as the holy woman paused for an instant, she would say beseechingly: "Mother, our Sisters are very distressed, because you have been so long without food". But often enough the holy woman took no notice, and continued to talk about her good Master, with love of whom her heart was on fire.

We find in her letters, and especially in those addressed to Mother Julia, some of her transports of Divine love expressed in short, rapid passages. "How ardently I desire to see you again," she writes in 1835, "but above all how I long for the time when we shall all of us be united for ever in the bosom of God, our good Master, our Father, our Spouse! Oh! what a title. My heart melts within me in thinking of so much happiness. Yes, my dear daughter, what happiness to be for ever united in the bosom of God, as His Faithful Companions. How this thought consoles us and helps us to support, for the love of God, the share He is pleased to allow us of the sufferings and humiliations of His passion.[1] Take courage, let us suffer with our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh! let Him be the one object of all our love!"

Her love of the cross is again and again betrayed in Madame d'Houet's writings. "Let us love the cross, my beloved daughter, let us love it more than misers

[1] February 11, 1840.

love their gold. I do not love this good cross and yet I understand how precious it is."[1] "If all things were to prosper according to our desires, we should not be the Companions of Jesus, who was persecuted during His whole life. To-day, the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, I have prayed and asked others to pray for you, dear Mother Julia. A day will come, I hope, when we shall be for ever united and close to our Lord, happy always to bear His Name and to be His Companions. Let us persevere, my dear daughter, with unfailing fidelity, and let us ponder on the nothingness of the things of the world, for thus only will our crosses seem lighter."[2] "Pray very much for our dear Society, that our Lord may continue Himself to bless and guide it in the sure and prosperous way of His holy cross."[3] Her love for the good Master made her cherish the souls which He has bought at the price of His precious blood. She burned with zeal for the salvation of all mankind. Beginning with the poor, her zeal embraced every class of persons. This zeal for souls, which had been from the outset the moving principle of her life, upheld her courage in the midst of the rudest trials. Passages taken down by her from works she had read, and which were found among her papers after her death, show the trend of her thoughts at the time when God began to unfold to her His designs. We discover in her extracts from the lives of holy persons and in accounts she kept by her of the foundation of certain religious institutions, those traits emphasized which deal directly with acts of zeal, of self-renunciation, of courage, and of patience in times of suffering. One is struck too in noting how she picks out incidents to prove that holy women have in

[1] June 16, 1835. [2] January 14, 1843. [3] June 11, 1844.

all ages worked actively for the salvation of souls. It would be easy to conjecture that her zeal would have carried her to even greater lengths than it did had not Christian prudence and obedience held her back. Those of the Faithful Companions, who had the privilege of knowing their Foundress, realised how she loved them with a strong, real, and supernatural affection, having in view but one thing—the good of each particular soul which God had entrusted to her. Her tender love for her daughters and her zeal for souls made her positively suffer when any of them fell seriously ill. She wished at all cost to save their valuable lives, so that they might toil in the vineyard of Christ. "If we were Carmelites," she used to say, "we could do nothing better than to go to Heaven, and I would let you go without a murmur, but for us it is quite a different matter." When the Master's call came at last and she recognised His holy will, she accepted the blow with perfect resignation, but up to the last, like the Royal Prophet of old, she never ceased to pray, to hope, and to employ with motherly care every remedy natural and supernatural, to preserve such precious and useful lives. "Mère Legrand has been very ill for the past three weeks," she writes, "only a miracle can save her. We must pray continually, remembering with submission to God's will, that He can do all things, and that we have great intercessors before His throne."[1] "God asks us to make a great sacrifice. I shall pray up to the last moment, and if this dear Mother is taken, then hope that God will give me the necessary courage to bear the trial."[2] "I am greatly grieved to hear of the death of Mother Caroline. Let us submit in all things to the

[1] September 16, 1836. [2] September 9, 1836.

holy will of God. Perhaps He only wants to try our faith. Let us pray and suffer with patience; and may God's will be done in us and by us all."[1] After the death of this beloved and valued daughter, she even remonstrated with the community at Carouge where that event took place. "You are wanting in good sense thus to grieve inordinately for Mother Caroline. This cherished and capable young Mother is not lost to the Society. She will obtain far more for us in Heaven than she could ever have done on earth, virtuous and talented though she was. So, let us rejoice, and let our joy be a proof in the sight of God and of His holy Mother of our resignation."[2] "Pray much for our Sisters who are ill; many of them are very precious subjects. God is the Master; but my heart, though submissive, is cruelly torn."[3] "My very dear Mother," she wrote to a Superior who was out of health, "we continue to pray for you earnestly, that God may in His goodness leave you longer with us. Believe me you will not be the loser. Our Divine Master will pay you amply for the time you toil on earth."[4]

Humility, we are told, is the foundation of the spiritual life. This virtue had become, in the saintly Foundress's case, a very habit. Walking as she ever did in the presence of God, she beheld in herself only nothingness and misery. It may be said, without the least exaggeration, that no one ever detected in her a word or action which indicated the least self-esteem or the slightest wish to seek the good opinion of others. She often begged that her defects might be pointed out, an act of charity which she asked not only of her spiritual daughters, but even of persons outside the Society. In 1824 or the year

[1] April 8, 1841.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] April 26, 1841.
[4] June 23, 1841.

following, when called to Nantes on business, she resided for some time in the house of a virtuous Christian family by whom she was much esteemed. She asked Monsieur N—— as she herself recounts, to tell her candidly what faults he had remarked in her. He replied, but we may well imagine, with reluctance and hesitation, "I think that you are sometimes over-eager in desiring and seeking subjects for your Society. God knows best those who are suited for your work, which is also His, and He will send you, in His own good time, those whom He judges fit."[1] Madame d'Houet recommended her daughters to repeat the following prayer with which she was familiar: "My God, grant that I may become holy without my knowing it, and without its being perceived by others". She had a horror of flattery, and looked upon as such even the simplest word of appreciation addressed to her. On such occasions her face became serious and almost severe, and she immediately forbade the repetition of any expression savouring even indirectly of praise. On certain occasions, her words were so grave that they alarmed those who heard her. "Reject," she would say, "the least thought of pride with the same promptitude that you would a thought against the angelic virtue."[3] So great was known to be her fear of taking from God the least part of the glory due to Him, that persons speaking with

[1] Madame d'Houet received this remark in the spirit of humility. It was perhaps the echo of the inconsiderate and unkind reports which were in circulation against her. In view of the urgent and ever increasing work that lay before the Society, it was but natural and reasonable that she should desire to see vocations multiply. Her conduct nevertheless, as we have seen in the case of Mother Legrand and her words on other occasions, showed that she wished to have good rather than numerous subjects, quality rather than quantity. She was grateful for the gentleman's remark, and promised to profit by it.

[2] April 26, 1841.

[3] June 23, 1841.

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CANADA
Founded 1888

[*See p.* 360]

CONVENT OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS, ST. ANNE'S, EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CANADA
Founded 1910

[*See p.* 361]

her shunned even passing allusions to the blessings bestowed upon the works of the Society. When these were mentioned in her presence she almost gave the impression of being a disinterested listener. Contrariwise, she appeared to dwell with complacency on the contradictions and humiliations which God sent her in no stinted measure. She had nothing so much at heart as to impress on her daughters the fact that she was to be looked upon as a cipher in the foundation of the Society. In all that she effected to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, her one great endeavour was to blot out from remembrance any share she had herself taken in the work. Assuredly she succeeded, for hardly any holy life remains more hidden and is less known to the world than her own. As a general rule she abstained from speaking of herself, but from time to time in her correspondence, words escape her which revealed what was passing within her: "Do not let our Sisters know that you have worries," she writes to a Superior. "Offer all to God for the pardon of my sins."[1] "Pray much for us, but, above all, for your poor Mother who is so lacking in the virtues which she ought to possess."[2] "Pray, oh, pray much for your Mother, especially for my soul which you love, I hope, better than my miserable body."[3] "Every Sunday, after supper, let our Mothers and Sisters say three Paters and three Aves in union with the Confraternity of Notre Dame des Victoires, for the conversion of sinners, among whom we also have our place, and let them keep my conversion specially in view."[4] "Pray for me, and especially for my conversion."[5]

[1] November 16, 1838. [2] February 26, 1833.
[3] October 25, 1844. [4] September 28, 1847.
[5] October 8, 1827.

CHAPTER XX.

MADAME D'HOUET'S VIRTUES (*Continued*).

MADAME D'HOUET'S faith and humility rendered her sanctity heroic in the theological sense of the word.

Caring for God alone, she measured her standards by His and utterly despised and mistrusted herself. Thus it was that she resigned herself without a murmur to the judgments passed upon her by men—she thought no more of the esteem and praise of the world than of its blame. In great things as in small, God and God's glory were all in all to her. "We must do whatever we can do," she writes, "but it is useless to try to please everybody."[1] No human motive ever prevented her from doing God's will and none from promoting His glory in so far as it depended upon her. Never under any of the varied and unjust accusations to which she was subjected, did she seek to justify herself except when she thought the well-being and reputation of her Society to be at stake. It rarely happened, however, even then that she judged it necessary to defend herself, for she knew full well how, on such occasions, nature is but too prone to listen to the promptings of injured self-love. A very well-known and very experienced religious,[2] in reading Abbé Martin's life of Madame d'Houet, was so struck by her patience and gentle forbearance that he used to say: "God has tried few souls as He tried

[1] February 4, 1843. [2] The late Father Peter Gallwey, S.J.

Madame d'Houet. Her example gives me courage in my own trials." If sometimes she spoke with warmth, it was when there was question of the interests and glory of God. Her words were never the expression of personal disappointment, and every reproof or display of holy indignation, as we may term it, would forthwith be followed by her completely regaining her wonted self-possession. Truly she was mistress of her feelings and held them under perfect control. She recommended her religious to go about the house in a quiet, recollected manner, for instance, to shut doors gently, and she often corrected them for failing to do so. On such occasions she would say: "You think that it is, perhaps, on my own account I find fault and that I am so particular on this point, because noise distresses me personally. But you are mistaken, it is because noise destroys the silence that ought to reign in a religious house." It was often remarked that when age and infirmities forced her to accept the services of others, she chose by preference not merely very simple-minded persons, but such as by reason of their clumsiness and ignorance would have taxed the patience and forbearance of any but a saint. She never showed the least annoyance at any mistake or neglect, nor indeed at other more serious happenings, when she was really stung to the quick. It occurred very often that previous to the recreation hour she received letters containing painful news, yet she presided at the Sisters' meeting with her characteristically composed manner and delightful cheeriness. To see and hear her, it was impossible to suspect that she could be a prey not rarely to the saddest of thoughts. When well nigh crushed beneath one of the heaviest of the crosses which the closing years of her life brought her, she wrote: "You are exceedingly kind, my dear

Mother, to trouble yourself about these matters. If the wish of those who persecute us is to disturb our peace, they succeed but poorly, as far as I am concerned. I am convinced that all we undergo will eventually contribute to the welfare of our little Society and of our own souls."[1] Let us quote another passage where Madame d'Houet, in her humility and gentleness, advises others to preserve that peace of soul to which she had so tutored herself: "My dearest daughters, though what I have remarked has caused you pain, you well know that it was not my intention to inflict it. I love you too dearly for that. I simply said what I thought, so I beg of you to preserve your peace of mind and not to worry about anything. The vexatious trifles which trouble us here below, if borne in a proper spirit, will gain us recompense in the next world. Pray for me; I am beginning to be more or less at home with contradictions, for they come to me daily from some one or other of our houses." "Take advice," she writes, concerning an important matter, "but do not worry nor be over anxious. We have not offended God. That is enough."[2] The local Superior of Turin had expressed a very natural sentiment of fear for the safety of the convent buildings. Necessary repairs as a safeguard against probable accident were needed. This was Madame d'Houet's answer; "Dear Mother N—— I only wish I could relieve you of all your troubles, and that I could prevent the walls from falling, the joists from giving way, the hills from rolling down into the valleys! Yet, it is clear that we must face probable difficulties without losing our peace of soul. God is always by our side and taking care of us."

Her conscience was exquisitely delicate in all that

[1] April 2, 1885. [2] August 2, 1841.

touched upon charity. She never uttered an uncharitable word, and banished from her mind every thought which could in the least take from the bloom of this beautiful virtue. She was ingenious in excusing others, and when no palliation of wrongdoing occurred to her mind she used to attribute a fault to the culprit's state of health. The severest censure which she was known to allow herself to pronounce—and of this we find repeated examples in her letters—was that the guilty party's mind must for the time being have been unhinged. Sometimes when complaints which she thought excessive were made she would say: "The change in so-and-so's conduct dates from that blow she received or from that illness of hers".[1] In this spirit she repressed all natural indignation and abstained from all harsh criticism of those who had not answered to her expectations. Undoubtedly she did not fail to blame the fault and took all necessary precautions against its repetition, but with wise and tactful prudence she shielded the character of the person who had fallen, ever forbearing to pass judgment on her intention and all but justifying that which in itself seemed indefensible. One who owed her a deep debt of gratitude made an unworthy return to her and her Society: "Say nothing of this matter concerning N——," she writes; "charity obliges us to hide such things, unless it be absolutely necessary to divulge them."[2] The perfection of her charity and forbearance towards others, was particularly admirable in regard to those who were consistently opposed to her in the work to which God had called her. In spite of all they did against her she ever retained a holy respect and even veneration and esteem for them. "I have never had to reproach myself in the confessional with

[1] April 20, 1841. [2] March 21, 1839.

any feeling against them," she often and often repeated. Knowing, as we do, her extreme delicacy of conscience, what must have been the self-control, to which she had disciplined herself, in order to enable her to stifle even first movements of bitterness and resentment. And if, as we have seen, she was inventive in framing excuses for the faults of those who had strayed far from the path of duty, much more was she indulgent of every-day imperfections and frailties. It was not weakness which made her shirk giving correction, but that knowledge of human nature which begets consideration for its instability and waywardness. At times subordinate superiors spoke with some irritation, and perhaps with a touch of annoyance, of the failings of their subjects, but the venerable Mother-General, while condemning what deserved blame and pointing out remedies, with the instinct of a true Mother protected and shielded the accused or the guilty. One day, after a conversation of this kind, she said to one of her daughters: "Whatever others may say, I find them all very good". Surely the saintly Foundress had in their fulness the twin gifts so precious in those who govern—gentleness in manner, vigour in deed. As the Latins phrase it in their terse adage, she ruled: "Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re".

Extracts from her letters will show in what manner the wise Superior-General knew how to correct without discouraging, and at the same time to reassure timid souls after a fault, and encourage even their smallest efforts. "Do not worry even though you sometimes do a thing which you know I cannot approve of. Be certain that, provided one acts with an upright intention and a sincere desire to obey, God will arrange all things for the best."[1] "Be assured that I am always pleased

[1] November 2, 1837.

with what you do, and, should it happen that you make a mistake, that I remember you are not an angel. I hope that God will be merciful to all of us who on earth have served Him imperfectly, but still with our whole heart, and that we shall enjoy the happiness of being united in His bosom hereafter."[1] "Come, courage and confidence. If you are good and grateful, I will tell you all the faults which I remark in you; but I wish you to feel that I am thereby doing you a favour."[2] "My dear Sister, I am pleased that you desire to go to Heaven with the Saints, but surely you know that the way thither is by the Cross. Try, therefore, to overcome yourself with regard to N——. If you conquer yourself, you will taste great spiritual sweetness."[3] "Do not worry about what happened between you and N——. God, she, and I have pardoned you. Take courage, my dear daughter; a few years and all will be ended, and for ever."[4] "You know, my dear daughter," she wrote to one who was over-sensitive, "you know that my heart is full of affection for you, but I am weak enough not to wish to pain you; so you must help me to correct myself on this point."[5] "It grieves me to find you always looking at the dark side of things. Let us acknowledge our faults, certainly, but do not let us be downcast over them. I repeat, I have forgiven you, and I love you with all my heart in spite of your faults and of my own."[6] "I beg of you not to be uneasy, God alone is infallible. Unfortunately we often make mistakes, but God, in His infinite goodness, forgives us. I, though a sinner, and without any natural goodness, by God's grace always pardon the faults of our Sisters,

[1] 1837.
[2] November 25, 1838.
[3] September 23, 1841.
[4] July 4, 1842.
[5] June 16, 1843.
[6] June 21, 1845.

and will not He do so?"[1] "You should have written to me before making this promise, but you are not to worry. I tell you this for your guidance on other occasions. Were we to be discomposed each time we make a mistake, we should very soon be good for nothing. To suffer ourselves to be so is not God's will neither is it mine."[2] "Do not worry about your faults, place them with confidence in the Heart of our Lord, together with mine, which are many and great."[3] "My dear daughter, when it happens that I have to correct or warn you, do not think that I am displeased or vexed. I only make the remarks I do, because it is my duty, and because we ought mutually to assist one another."[4] "The position which I hold is a very responsible one, obliging me under pain of sin to warn our Sisters when I see them do anything wrong; still I love them none the less. I am perfectly conscious that they are not angels, much less am I one myself." "Do not worry yourself, as you seem to be doing at present, my dear daughter, when you have made a mistake; God is full of mercy and love." "Never be downhearted. Nothing can be expected from those who are discouraged over trifles."[5] "I was very grieved to be obliged to leave you so soon after I had reproved you for your faults. I wished so much to have given you proofs of my tender and sincere affection. Tell all our Mothers and Sisters that my heart is ever full of affection for them. Let us pray for one another, and that God, in His infinite mercy, may unite us closely to Himself, happy in the thought of enjoying the inestimable privilege of doing for evermore His holy will. While waiting for

[1] January 27, 1843.
[2] Dec. 19, 1842.
[3] Feb. 22, 1844.
[4] 1845.
[5] Feb. 24, 1846.

this happiness, let us do our best to be united to Him, and to observe with fidelity the holy rules which He has given us."[1]

Side by side with faith and charity, Madame d'Houet carefully cultivated the virtues especially characteristic of religious souls. We have already noticed how from the very beginning of her call to the higher life, she felt a special attraction to the practice of holy poverty, and how earnestly she desired to follow our Lord by renouncing all worldly riches. Wise direction which she took as the expression of God's will, prevented her from establishing in her Society that strict practice of poverty to which she herself aspired. Still the essential spirit and perfection of the virtue have never been lost sight of. With this in view, she made it a rule that everything not absolutely necessary was to be dispensed with. Thus, her daughters sleep in a common dormitory, and take their rest on a simple mattress. Those occupied in teaching have a single desk in a common room containing only such things as pertain to their charge. Here, as a rule, the Superior also has her desk. No one has permission to keep money, however small the sum, collected for any good work, but must hand it over to the Superior until such time as it is required. Madame d'Houet did not approve of private altars, such as the devotion of individuals sometimes leads to their wishing to erect in the place of their own employment. These and others of the sort are the regulations and recommendations, under the protection of which she placed the virtue of holy poverty. From the same motive she looked upon activity in one's work as an obligation incumbent on religious, and, above all, on Faithful Companions of Jesus. "We should

[1] 1858.

work," she was accustomed to say, "not as ladies in the world who take up an occupation to kill time, but as poor people who have to earn their livelihood."

In this respect the Superior-General was herself a living example to her daughters. She always chose for clothing, food, and personal accommodation that which was poorest and simplest. The room which her duty obliged her to reserve for private use was furnished with a poor bed, an old desk, a cupboard for business papers, and some common chairs. A few devotional statues and unframed pictures were its only decorations. One of the old pupils mentioned elsewhere, to whom she had been a second mother, and who loved her deeply in return, made her a cover for an arm-chair in the plainest style of Berlin tapestry. In order to avoid paining her Madame d'Houet accepted the gift, but had it upholstered as a very comfortless, and miscalled, "easy chair". She breathed her last sigh seated on this same chair. After one of her illnesses towards the end of her life, Dr. Recamier had to use his authority, as physician, to oblige her to take such ordinary diet as her state of health required. She took the utmost care of her poor clothes which, though always neat, were much mended and patched. All this care was the outcome of her love of holy poverty. She inculcated on her daughters the taking the utmost care of their clothes and the carrying of the spirit of order into their charges and employment, as a means of practising religious poverty. "Look," she remarked on one occasion, "already a stain on a new apron; that is contrary to the spirit of poverty." "Tell Mother N——," she writes in 1842, "that she ought to mend with the greatest care, and even with respect, the clothes of the poor children with whom she is charged. Let her do this in the spirit of holy poverty, remember-

ing her vow. Her own clothes also she ought to keep well-mended and patched." Although Madame d'Houet was by nature generous, she often appeared to the outside world exacting in demanding money due to the Society, and in refusing to pay more than she considered just. In this she acted on principle, for she did not consider she had any right to dispose of money merely entrusted to her keeping. Thus, in small things and in great, an extreme delicacy of conscience made her carry the practice of holy poverty to a high perfection.

Detachment from creature-comforts, the result of her love of holy poverty, was all-important in her eyes, for she looked upon it as the first step towards the acquisition of that pearl of virtues—holy purity. She hedged in this frail and delicate virtue which she was wont to call, "the glory of the spouses of the Lamb," with special safeguards—mortification both exterior and interior, detachment from creatures, and habits of silence and recollection.[1] From the foundation of the Society, she established a very strict practice of silence. No useless words were permitted during the day, and during recreation hours a general conversation only was allowed which was to turn on subjects tending to elevate the mind as well as to recreate. "Do not tolerate breaches of silence," she writes to a Superior, "and do not give permission for private conversations. I would rather destroy a house than permit them."[2] She often spoke of the peace and happiness that silence brings to the soul, and of the way it frees a religious from serious faults.

[1] Madame d'Houet's love of the holy virtue made her during the last years of her life, in spite of her general weakness and prostration, refuse the usual services given to the sick. She would allow no one to assist her even on the very day of her death.

[2] January 28, 1841.

She used to relate with much consolation, that on one occasion, when she had been speaking of the dangers arising from particular friendships between religious persons, some one who had just joined the Society said: "But, Mother, how can we ever have particular friendships, since we are not even allowed to say 'Good morning' to one another?" She also advised her daughters to practise interior silence. "The less intercourse you have with creatures," she would say, "the more you will speak to God, and the more distinctly will you hear His voice speaking within your soul. A voluntary calling to mind of the persons and things we have left, and of the years which we passed in the world, would be an infidelity to grace." "Make a point," we read in one of her letters, "always to cultivate that spirit of recollectedness which is the life of a religious soul. I have a feeling that there is too much talking going on among you. I hope I am mistaken."[1]

Father Varin used to say that Madame d'Houet led a very austere life. We know that she practised exterior penance, and that constantly; but she was ingenious in concealing her penitential practices, and from respect for her wishes, her daughters, up to the present day, have never made public those which she did not altogether succeed in hiding. During the last years of her life, when her body was worn out with sufferings, she had dotted down on a slip of paper a few things which caused her uneasiness. Amongst these, we read: "I do not practise any corporal penances except in the matter of sleep". During the greater part of her life, as we have already noticed, she kept vigil before the Blessed Sacrament every night from eleven o'clock until midnight. This practice did not prevent

[1] 1854.

her from rising regularly at four o'clock each morning. She acknowledged that this first act of the day was a real mortification. Up to the very day of her death, she persisted in rising at four o'clock notwithstanding the many distressing infirmities of her declining years and the long hours of insomnia which resulted from them. She seldom spoke about penitential exercises and austerities, though, when God led a soul to desire to practise them, she gladly permitted them. From time to time she reminded her daughters at their spiritual conferences that though their rules did not oblige them to the practice of bodily austerities, there were some which might be taken up without any detriment to health, which therefore they could seek permission to perform. She was ingenious too in suggesting commutations to those whose weak constitutions prohibited not only penitential practices of supererogation, but those imposed by the discipline of the Church. "Don't be distressed," she writes, "you must not fast, and you must not even abstain." Instead of keeping the Church's precept from which you are dispensed, make every effort to be faithful to the rule of holy obedience, and often say during the day: "Jesus, my God and my all. What do I desire on earth or even in Heaven but Thee? Draw me after Thee, O Lord, and I will run in the odour of Thy sweetness."

Great as was the importance which Madame d'Houet attached to exterior mortification, she attached still more to the interior practice of this virtue, to the controlling and guarding of the senses, and to the acquiring of the religious gravity and decorum required by the Rule. In her own person there was not a gesture, not a movement, which was not perfectly in accordance with religious modesty and reserve. Her very presence had

the effect of enforcing the rules regarding this, yet there was nothing forbidding or austere in her manner, which was always pleasing and courteous. At recreation hours she was bright, resourceful, and entertaining, without, on the one hand, imposing restraint, or, on the other, allowing anything which in a religious community might be considered light, frivolous, or worldly. Her character bore the impress of perfect self-discipline and of the subjection of nature to grace. Nor was there anything exaggerated or artificial in her manners, which were a happy blending of religious simplicity, refinement, and good breeding.

Madame d'Houet was lavish of affection and consideration for the weak and halting, for souls under the pressure of temptation, and for all who for any reason specially needed her sympathy and help. She once remarked: "It would be very sweet and in accordance with my natural inclination to bestow proofs of affection on our Sisters who are all so good and virtuous, but God does not wish it to be so. It is better for them and for me that we warn one another of our defects." She carried self-forgetfulness and zeal for the good of others to the highest perfection, and recommended both as virtues proper to the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. "Tell Sister N——," she writes, "that I am very glad to hear she is making progress. If she would only forget self and sacrifice all for God she would be a very useful instrument in doing good". "Do not fear to devote yourselves to your work and to forget self," she used to say; "your Superiors are there to see that you are not too zealous, and even if they forget or neglect their duty you will not be the losers." "Impress upon all our Sisters that the spirit of devotedness and self-abnegation is the spirit of our Lord and the spirit which

should animate us."[1] Madame d'Houet's life was a continual carrying out of these lessons. In a matter of duty or of the fulfilling of God's will she never stepped aside nor spared herself, however rough the road and narrow the path. To carry out God's will was the one longing of her soul. "Pray much that I may not do anything contrary to the will of God."[2] "Tell all our dear Sisters that I wish them a happy New Year, one wherein we may more perfectly accomplish God's will. By doing His will we become assured of the unspeakable happiness of one day enjoying His presence."[3] "Yes, my dear daughter, let us love God's holy will above all things: it is so advantageous and so good for us."[4] "How much I long to be with you, my well-beloved daughters; but while we wait for the fulfilment of this wish, let us submit with all our hearts to the will of God. How can we ever say that we wish for the accomplishment of God's will, if we do not continually submit to it in all things? In heaven, where we shall see plainly God's goodness, it will be impossible not to prefer His will to everything else."[5] "Should it be the will of God, what you suggest shall be done. My dear daughter, do not be anxious. We are in God's hands, and there let us stay. It is much better to carry heavy crosses with Him, than to be at our ease without Him, even if it were possible to be so."[6] "Let us do our best that our little Society may be what God wishes it to be," she wrote to a Superior, "otherwise He will set us on one side, and will hand over our work to those who are more submissive to His will and more faithful

[1] 1854.
[2] 10 October, 1828.
[3] 20 December, 1840.
[4] 4 June, 1841.
[5] 30 October, 1841.
[6] 27 September, 1835.

to the holy rules which He has given us."[1] "Our Sisters are thinking of purchasing a country house. Pray for that intention, but above all things pray that whatever we undertake may be God's holy will. That is our one desire."[2] "My dear daughter, in all matters only have one desire, that God's will may be done."[3]

A first practical outcome of Madame d'Houet's devotion to the Divine will was her love for and appreciation of its exponent, the voice of obedience. We have seen how faithfully she obeyed Father Varin in regard to her vocation and to the foundation of the Society. Later on, up to the year 1826, she still obeyed him and the Jesuit Fathers whom he had named, notwithstanding their being opposed to her work. She preferred to risk its destruction rather than to withdraw from obedience, and as we have seen, it was only at the command of the Pope that she broke off her relations with the Jesuits. Afterwards, whenever the will of God was not clear, she consulted the guide in whose hands she had been placed, and followed his decisions in all things. She looked upon obedience to Superiors and the exact observance of the holy rules which are for religious the expression of God's will, as the compass directing heavenwards, and as the strongholds and foundations of religious life—its Alpha and Omega. We have noticed this elsewhere, but we must once more allow her to speak on this subject. "I implore of all our dear Sisters to give themselves to God with their whole hearts, and to remember that obedience and entire renouncement of self are the two marked characteristics which stamp the members of our Society—their hall-mark. Each one will observe her rule the more perfectly in proportion as she practises these two virtues which are so pleasing to the heart of

[1] 25 December, 1844. [2] 28 January, 1846. [3] 1853.

our Master and Heavenly Spouse. How happy shall we be at the moment of death, if we have always acted up to our obligations!"[1] "I exhort all our dear Sisters to great exactitude and fidelity in their obedience, so that they may merit an eternal reward and not lose any of the immense graces God has destined for them."[2] "I rejoice that God does not in any of our houses bless what is contrary to the true spirit of obedience."[3] "When the rule is strictly kept, a great deal of work is accomplished because God Himself does more than half of it. We must not rely upon ourselves in all these matters, but upon Him who has established the Society, and who wishes it to exist according to his own plan—a plan that is founded upon obedience, self-renunciation, and silence. If any arrangement which I may order dissatisfies you, my dear Mother, accept it nevertheless, and with joy, as a means of practising the submission of judgment so recommended to us; and be thoroughly convinced that God will bless only that which our rule and our Superiors decide for us. Otherwise He would be contradicting His own orders."[4] "God does not bless a convent where subjects do not practise submission of judgment; moreover they injure their own souls and that grievously. Let us pray much and practise our holy rules as faithfully as possible."[5] "The essential point, nay, the *only* essential point, my dear Mother, is to do the will of God, by obedience to our rules and to whatever our Superiors may arrange. The good Master will then give to our small efforts the blessing which He holds in His hands. As to ourselves, personally, it is more profitable that, like our Lord, we should have

[1] 16 April, 1836. [2] November, 1836.
[3] 1 May, 1843. [4] 4 December, 1841. [5] 1852.

humiliation and crosses as our portion."[1] "What you tell me of N—— distresses me very much, and I fear that the spirit of blind obedience is growing less in our Society. If this be the case, God will reject us. I beg of you, my dear Mother, to speak often of the respect, obedience, and love which is due to Superiors." "Only those who are themselves truly obedient, can command others." "Be most particular, my dear Sisters, to be very obedient and to cultivate as our holy rules recommend, submission of judgment. In our communities God blesses none but obedient souls. Any one in office would lose God's blessing for herself and for persons and charges with which she is entrusted, if she were not herself submissive. I have seen striking instances of this."[2] "Time is short; let us have no other wish than to conform faithfully to the obligations imposed by our holy rules. Thus only can we accomplish God's will."[3]

That she herself might not for an instant deviate from the sure path of God's will, she had offered herself to Him to be His, entirely and for ever; and she often renewed that oblation. Her one desire was that in great things, as in small, she might be a pliant instrument in God's hands and in very truth a handmaid of the Lord. Persons were wont to look upon Madame d'Houet as merely enterprising. Her work was slightingly alluded to as the outcome of a lively imagination and of indefatigable personal energy coupled with strength and determination of will. Yet, had the establishment of her Society been the result of mere human efforts, even of such indefatigable exertions as have been described, assuredly it would have long since disappeared or perhaps have come to an end, as was

[1] 1855. [2] 6 April, 1846. [3] 15 May, 1845.

so often predicted, with the life of its Foundress. The march of time and events has proved it to be no short-lived institution. Those who knew her intimately are unanimous in declaring that gifted as Madame d'Houet undoubtedly was with a clear, unerring judgment and with a strength of will given to few of her sex, she never allowed mere human reasoning or earthly calculations to influence her in the great work of her life. No trouble, no bodily fatigue, or other hindrance could make her swerve from a course of action, once she knew for certain it was backed by the greatest of all supports—God's holy will. If on the other hand it pleased God to leave her in doubt on a point, then in spite of the clearness of her own mature judgment or of the dictates of human prudence, she abstained from acting, no matter what inconvenience might ensue.

In conforming herself to the known will of God she often turned a deaf ear to the dictates of her own well-trained judgment and exceptional good sense, and oftener still did she set aside her feelings and natural affections. To how much this cost her, her contemporaries bear frequent witness. She had a warm heart, and loved her daughters deeply and tenderly, while they, in their turn, bore her a strong and filial affection. Hence, when she visited her convents, her arrival was a joy to all, and her subsequent departure a real grief. She understood their regret at losing her and shared it, but never did she grant herself the human satisfaction of remaining one hour longer in the house than duty required. One day, in England, her daughters importuned her lovingly to stay a little longer with them. Her reply has the ring of sanctity. "I only wish I could stay with you, but such is not God's will." The tone with which these simple words were pronounced

was a revelation to all who heard them. Nature and Grace had striven together, and poor nature had been worsted.

All that we have said so far on the subject of the virtues of the Foundress, shows her to have been the woman "valiant and prudent" of Holy Writ. May she not, too, be compared to the wise merchant of the Gospel, who having found one pearl of great price sold all he had to purchase it? We know from her writings and from those who knew her that the thought of the eternal reward awaiting her in Heaven encouraged and comforted her in labours and sufferings borne for the good of others, the enduring of which is the apostolate of her order. "It is a good trade to be a saint," she would often say. "The saints were good men and women of business and we must all absolutely become saints. What shall we gain if we don't?"[1] "My children," she said one day at a meeting of young Sodalists of our Lady: "I seem much older than you are and yet there is no material difference in our years, for with those who are to live eternally there is no such thing as age". And this idea, which was a familiar one of hers, inspired these young girls with salutary thoughts on the eternity of heavenly rewards and the nothingness of earth.

Prudence, as the reader must have remarked, characterised Madame d'Houet's dealings with those whom she governed. It was her principle to talk little to women about virtue, but to lead them to practise it by such simple methods that they became virtuous without knowing it. At gatherings of her religious she was always calm and composed in manner and expression of countenance, no matter how much cause for vexation

[1] 15 December, 1839.

and disappointment she might have had beforehand. As a rule she refrained from correcting faults in public, because of her wish to shield every one's good name. Besides, she aimed at leading her daughters to practise their rules through love of our Lord, and preferred preventing faults to correcting them. Her admonitions were short and simple, but effective. By receiving a correction humbly from her, one rose, with her, as it were, to a supernaturally rarefied atmosphere.

In private interviews she dealt with each one of her daughters, according to the Sister's individual strength of soul and character. Her words were few, but they rarely failed to produce the proposed effect. They encouraged, fortified, or humbled, according to each one's need. "Why do you change colour now that I speak to you of your faults," she once remarked kindly to a young religious, "you did not blush a moment ago, when I spoke to some one else of hers." These words were a light to the Sister and helped her more in the knowledge of self than a long discourse.

The Foundress looked with suspicion on persons who professed to make progress in the way of perfection by methods unusual in the Church. She used to say: "Many such persons have crossed my path, and I can assure you I have never met one who has not been the dupe of illusion. Besides, such things generally end unfortunately. These so-called extraordinary ways are mostly plausible means employed by the evil one to ruin souls." Her wish was that the piety of her daughters should be perfectly simple both exteriorly and interiorly, and that their deportment at prayer should be reverent and recollected, but free from affectation or mannerism. In this, as in all else, she was a model to them. When she saw a postulant interspersing her meditation with sighs

and tears and making an emotional display of her devotion, she used to say: "She will not suit us; she is too holy". As a matter of fact, she dismissed such persons promptly unless indeed they moderated their excesses of fervour.

Madame d'Houet, keen, clear woman of business as she was, was usually reticent about her affairs. Persons often thought that in her enterprises she habitually overestimated her probabilities of success, but it rarely happened that events did not justify her surmises. Her moral strength of purpose showed itself, as we have seen, in the tenacity with which she pursued her mission. She followed up her works, as shown in her life, with steady determination and directness of purpose. Neither the being treated unjustly by those who ought to have been her friends and mainstay, nor their opposition, desertion, or even contempt ever held her back or made her flinch, provided only she felt she was doing what it was her duty to do.

Madame d'Houet joined to a courage born of her unshaken trust in God, a wise restraint in carrying out her mission. "I think," she wrote once to a Superior, "that one must not always expect everything to be perfect. We must rely on those whom God has placed under our care and not lay too much stress on their failings."[1]

"I feel, my dear Mother, that you overdo your work, and you would succeed much better if you exerted yourself less. Perfection is not found in this world. We must expect to have to deal with the imperfect."

May we, in concluding these chapters on Madame d'Houet's virtues, epitomize them by saying that, in so far as human weakness permitted, she "fulfilled all

[1] 30 March, 1841.

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Sacred Heart Convent, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Founded 1885

[*See p.* 360]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Aloysius' Convent, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Founded 1891

[*See p.* 360]

justice". She gave to God what was God's, and fixing her eyes upon Him alone, carried out her inspired mission with no other thought in her mind save the soul-thrilling motto of St. Ignatius Loyola: "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam".

For herself, she received, nay, she was satisfied with and even welcomed, contempt, scorn, and humiliation, as part of God's plan. "Unless the grain die first it cannot bear fruit." They were Father Foloppe's words to her, and she never forgot them.

CHAPTER XXI.

WONDERS PERFORMED BY MADAME D'HOUET DURING HER LIFETIME.

When Canon Law flashes its search-light on the life and virtues of a future "Beata," we are told, to use its own language, "that it is in accordance with truth that the servant of God should have performed many wonderful things during life".[1]

The documents constituting the Preliminary Inquiry on the sanctity of the venerable Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, drawn up by the Rev. Father Appollinaire, the first Vice-Postulator of the Cause of her Beatification and Canonization, contain many prophetic statements uttered by her. Among them are the following few examples.

One of the witnesses, giving evidence before the ecclesiastical tribunal, speaks thus:—

"I had several proofs that our venerable Mother came to know many things in a supernatural manner. During her illness at Châteauroux, in 1827, on the night that she received the last Sacraments, after passing through two hours of agony, she regained consciousness and requested the chaplain to summon one of our Mothers who was then in the chapel. The chaplain who was sitting by her, thinking she was still delirious, did not move. He was sure that the person

[1] Articles No. 176, p. 63.

she wanted, and who had passed the previous night with the venerable invalid, had retired to rest. The infirmarian said, 'Mother, she is in her bed'. The reply was: 'No, I assure you, she is in chapel at the feet of the statue of our Blessed Lady. Please go and tell her that I particularly wish to speak to her now.' As a matter of fact, the nun was found on the very spot indicated. When the holy woman saw her, she stretched out her hands, and embracing her with great tenderness, said: 'Do not weep any longer for I shall not die yet. Thank you, my dear Mother; your prayers have been heard. This illness will not be fatal.' When the chaplain and doctor had withdrawn, the holy Superior spoke to those around her of their obligations, and indicated several faults which would have to be corrected, revealing to each one privately, things known only to God and herself. She even named several persons as being those who would later on leave the Society. And all happened as the venerable Foundress had foreseen."

In 1847 Madame d'Houet's daughter-in-law was expecting a third child, and asking prayers that God would give her a daughter. "You will pray fervently for my daughter, will you not?" said the servant of God to her nuns. Then she added: "Poor Louise! she does not know what she is asking. No, no, she will not have a daughter, for God knows better than we what is best for us. She does not realise, dear little mother, that she must not count on her two boys. She will be very pleased one day that this third child is one too. He will console her in the trouble which God has in store for her." Years afterwards, this really came to pass.

Towards the end of October, 1847, before leaving Paris on one of her journeys, the venerable Foundress felt impelled to visit the Archbishop, Monseigneur Affre.

After seeing him she was leaving the archiepiscopal palace when she became absorbed in thought and said to her companions: "I was very anxious to visit the Archbishop, because we shall never see him more". The tragic death of Monseigneur Affre took place in the following June.[1]

Again, we find in this Preliminary Inquiry the following statement sworn to by one of her religious whose own mother wished to enter the Society. "My mother had the privilege of knowing our dear Foundress, and had had frequent conversations with her. She wished to enter the Society, but a long time passed before she saw her way to doing so. At last all difficulties were got over, and Madame d'Houet, who happened to be in England, kindly interviewed her there. My mother's object in this visit was to arrange definitely for her entrance into the Society. After a brief conversation, our Foundress rose to bid her visitor farewell, saying to the person who acted as interpreter: 'Tell Madame that she must not change her state of life. She must remain in the world, for God has still other work for her to do there.' It was only two years later, Almighty God showed her what this work was. One of my mother's sisters with her only daughter unexpectedly arrived at my mother's house. They had been robbed of all their money and property, and their very happy home had been suddenly broken up, so that they were forced to throw themselves on my mother's bounty and generosity, there being no one else to whom they could turn. No one could possibly have foreseen their misfortune. It was evidently Almighty God who had intimated to our holy Foundress His will that my mother should devote herself and her means to the support of these relatives."

[1] He was shot at the barricades of Paris, in Rue St. Honoré.

On Holy Thursday of the year 1853 the venerable Foundress, who had spent the day in retreat, told her assistant that Mother Julia would never be Superior-General. "I know," she said, "that our Mothers would give her their votes were I to die, and perhaps I myself shall appoint her Mother-Vicar; but our Lord has made known to me that it is not she who will replace me." More than this, Madame d'Houet predicted Mother Julia's death, and that of another of her daughters, in the following terms: "As for Mother Julia, I shall recall her to France" (she was then Provincial-Superior in England), "and she will die there. But you, Mother Anna, will die in England," she said, turning to this religious. The event bore out the truth of the prediction. Mother Anna died in England, and Mother Julia, quite unexpectedly, passed away three weeks after Madame d'Houet, at the Rue de la Santé. In the Annals of the house of Paris we read how, shortly after the death of Madame d'Houet, one day, when speaking with some of her companions of the virtues of the venerated Mother, Mother Julia exclaimed with much feeling: "O Mother! you told me that our separation would not be for long, and that very soon you would call me to you. Yet your summons has not come. How long the time seems!" That very night Mother Julia's end came.

It is certain that Madame d'Houet knew long before who was to succeed her as Superior-General. No human forecast could have availed for this; nor, in fact, did any one ever even suspect that her mantle was to fall on the shoulders of Mother Josephine Petit, who, for the last seventeen years, had been an invalid, and whose malady confined her to her room, and often to her bed. Seemingly, her life could never again be one of

activity. Whenever Madame d'Houet received any alarming news of Mother Josephine's state of health, her invariable remark was: "God has His own plans for Mother Josephine. In spite of her illness, let us have confidence in Him." One night, when Madame d'Houet herself was seriously ill, she called the religious who was watching at her bedside, and said: "Now, do exactly what I tell you. I count upon your obedience. Take all my papers, my documents, my keys, put them in a trunk, and send them to Mother Josephine at Carouge." And, as a matter of fact, it was Mother Josephine Petit who, after a miraculous recovery from her illness, succeeded the Foundress as Superior-General in September, 1858. She directed the Society for thirty years, and died on December 11, 1888, at Sainte-Anne-d'Auray.

Madame d'Houet was privileged to know of many events, with which she could not have become acquainted by natural means, and had also the gift of reading the secret thoughts of her daughters.

Thus, in 1844, at Amiens, she stopped speaking in the middle of a conversation, and said to her companion: "Let us say a prayer for our dear Sister, who is at this moment quitting the world". At the same instant, Sister Frances Palmer, a young novice, breathed her last at Gumley House. During her sojourn in Rome in 1837, she knew by supernatural means exactly what was happening about the memorial which she had drawn up for the perusal of Pope Gregory XVI. Yet this document, as we learn from her writings, and from the testimony of her companion, before it reached the Holy Father, was being passed from one hand to another in a most roundabout and irregular fashion. During her last illness at Paris, in 1858, the holy woman had knowledge

on her death-bed of the details of Mother Emilie's return journey to Switzerland, and of what followed on her subsequent arrival. "Mother Emilie Guers left for Carouge," says an eye-witness, "on Friday afternoon, April 2, 1858. When the next morning I asked the Sister who had attended on Notre Mère during the night for news of her: 'The night was not so bad,' was her reply, 'but she wandered.' 'What did she say?' I inquired. The Sister repeated her words as well as she could remember them. 'Mother Emilie is no longer sad; for our Lord Himself has consoled her. She will be welcomed at Carouge with rejoicings such as, up to now, have never been.' Her words were fulfilled to the very letter. When Mother Emilie reached Carouge on Holy Saturday morning, the pupils' delight was so great that the joyous rush to meet her, much to the terror of the nuns, almost caused the wooden verandah to give way."

The holy Foundress revealed to Mother Julia Guillemet, whilst still a child, the secret project she had conceived of embracing the religious life. Another time, a young person introduced her sister to Madame d'Houet as one who wished to join the Society. She replied with an assured tone of conviction: "It is not your sister but you yourself, who are called to the religious life". The event proved that she was right.

In the early days of the foundations in England, Mother Julia introduced three young girls to Madame d'Houet, telling her that one of them wished to enter the Society, and would make a useful subject. The holy woman said: "The one you are thinking of will not become a nun, but her youngest sister will". This, too, came to pass. A religious of her Society writes as follows:—

"Our holy Foundress certainly penetrated the secrets of hearts, and was able to reveal the hidden thoughts of others. Once, when I was going through painful interior trials, I went to Notre Mère intending to tell her of my troubles. But whilst with her I somehow did not allude to the matter, and spoke only on indifferent subjects. She then looked at me and said 'You do not tell me your trouble. Are not such and such your thoughts and temptations?' I was confused, and did not dare say another word, for she had mentioned the very thoughts which were running through my mind."

Here is what another witness had to relate :—

"I had been a novice but a few months when great interior distress came upon me. So far I had not mentioned the matter even to my confessor, when one day during recreation I noticed that Notre Mère looked at me several times, which made me feel a little confused. When the bell rang she called me and said: 'Sister, what is the matter? Are you ill?' I replied, 'There is nothing the matter with me, Mother'. 'You say there is nothing the matter, my dear Sister. Would you like me to tell you what is troubling you? Very well, it is such and such a thing.' Having described it with perfect accuracy, she encouraged me, and finished by saying with a smile: 'Now, are you comforted?'"

Examples of this nature abound. At her last visit to Dee Convent, Chester, in 1856, she had to speak very seriously to one of her English daughters. She feared that her French had not been understood, so she tried to talk to the Sister in English, but finding this difficult, relapsed into silence. Soon she raised her eyes to heaven and prayed for a short space. Then without the least hesitation, and, as if inspired, she spoke

in English, saying slowly, distinctly, and with perfect accent all she wished. The religious, who knew that the holy woman did not know any English, was astonished. Until that occasion no one had ever heard the venerated Superior speak any language other than French.

On one occasion, when Madame d'Houet was staying at Somers Town, little Mary Ann Reading, a pupil, was suffering from a gastric and pulmonary attack. The four doctors called in for consultation had declared her case hopeless. This announcement was a great grief to Madame d'Houet. Taking off her own scapulars, she placed them on the little patient who was a Protestant, and prayed with fervour. At once all dangerous symptoms disappeared and the child recovered to become afterwards a Catholic and later on a member of the Society.

Sister Gabrielle Huré herself narrates the particulars of her own strange recovery from sickness, attributing it to Madame d'Houet's prayers. "In 1846, or at the end of 1845, I was at Gumley House, where I had been a novice for a short time. My health was very unsatisfactory, and I suffered from boils which broke out on different parts of my body, especially on my legs. I suffered much, and at times the pain was so violent that I could not walk. One day at recreation, I heard one of our Mothers, whose name I cannot now recall, saying that a person who had been suffering in much the same way had been cured by using Notre Mère's umbrella. I said to Sister Eugénie: 'You must give me something which has belonged to Notre Mère so that I too may be cured'. She gave me a piece of linen, and that evening I placed it bandage-like on my legs. I slept soundly without feeling the slightest pain. On rising

next morning, I realized that I was quite cured, moreover that I could walk with ease. For the first few minutes I moved about warily and with precaution, but when I could no longer doubt, I ran up to the Superior's room and said : 'Mother, I am cured'."

Sister Lucy O'Leary, a lay-sister of the Society, is the next to tell us of her own happy experience :—

"On one occasion I saw with my own eyes how truly our Foundress's confidence in prayer was well placed. During one of her visits to Gumley House she had a severe illness which obliged her to keep to her bed. At this very time one of our Mothers fell dangerously ill. I was in the room when the news was brought to our venerated Mother, and I saw her rise immediately, though she had to make a great effort to do so, kneel at her bedside, and pray for some moments. Her attitude and look inspiring me with faith and respect, I said to myself, 'God cannot refuse what Notre Mère asks Him'. She then ordered that the statue which she called 'Our Lady of the Class' should be placed in the sick nun's room and a novena begun before it. Hardly was the statue brought to her when the patient began to feel better and she was soon completely cured. This she attributed to the prayers of Madame d'Houet. The nun thus favoured was Mother Mary Stokes who succeeded Mother Julia Guillemet as Superior of Gumley House. I heard our venerated Mother say that she invariably obtained any grace she asked in a novena made before the statue of 'Our Lady of the Class'."

What we are now about to relate is so remarkable that we give it in all its *naïve* simplicity just as we have it before us. The particulars were given by Sister Marie Pilet, a lay-sister. She begins :—

"I scarcely dare recount what happened to me, because I do not know if it was reality or only fancy; neither am I sure whether I was asleep or awake, though I remember very well my touching the curtains of my bed to make sure that I was really awake."

She goes on to give at full length the history of her vocation and a very interesting history it is. She was on the very verge of losing her vocation, on account of her love for her mother. She felt so much happiness in being with her that she could not make up her mind to leave home. One night she saw by her bedside two persons clad in black. The elder of the two, looking very grave, fixed her eyes on the girl. She did not speak but the young girl said that she heard interiorly distinct words addressed to her. They were to this effect: "Very well; you do not then wish to obey God and you wish to remain attached to worldly things. Listen, our Lord is speaking to your heart." The next day, as she was looking pale and tired, her mother said: "What is the matter Marie?" The daughter evaded giving a direct reply and only said: "Mother, are there any nuns who are dressed entirely in black?" "I do not know, my child, I have never seen any," was the reply. "Last night, I thought I saw some nuns of this kind by my bedside, and I have been troubled ever since" said the girl. In the course of the day a total change came over her; she felt she must leave her mother and obey God's call. She spoke later to her confessor, who directed her to visit the Convent at Nantes. When the portress, a lay-sister, opened the door, the girl was astounded, for here was a nun dressed all in black. However, she said to herself: "That is not the habit I saw." When she entered the parlour she was courteously received by two of the mothers, in whose costume she joyfully recognized

that of her dream, though the features and expression were not those of the Sisters she had seen. Some weeks afterwards she became a postulant. Thoughts of her mother and sister again troubled her, yet though much depressed, she did not think of returning to her family. Again, one night, she could never explain how it came about, she beheld the two Mothers of her vision standing by her bed. "This time," she said, "the elder of the two had a sweet smiling expression of countenance and seemed to be congratulating me on the step I had taken. Her looks and movements filled my heart with joy, and she appeared to say to me, 'Heaven! Heaven! my child'. When I rose next morning I did not know how to thank God for so many graces. Before this happened, the thought had often come to me that I could never bear to live separated from my parents; but after that night I easily made up my mind rather to die than to leave this house. I could not keep from kissing its very walls in my joy of heart." But this good Sister had naturally a great longing to see in the flesh the nun who had so wonderfully visited and comforted her. Whenever one of the Mothers arrived from a distance she made a point of examining the new-comer closely. At last one night the Superior awakened her in haste. Some persons had arrived unexpectedly and among the number was Mother Foundress. The young postulant was sent to light a fire for them. When she reached the door of the room with her bundle of sticks, she paused. She felt she could not go a step farther or she would have fainted, not with fear, but from a rapturous feeling of joy, while an interior voice seemed to admonish her, that she was about to behold the reality of her dream-picture. As a matter of fact, on entering the room she at once recognized in the venerated Mother, the black-robed

nun who had worked such a wonderful change in her. The holy woman, noticing her emotion, called her very kindly: "Come in, my dear child, come in". The poor young postulant was only able to take a few paces when she felt herself rooted to the spot where she stood. At that moment several other nuns entered the room, and she does not remember what followed. She only knows that her love and respect for the venerated Mother increased continuously from that day, and she has since experienced an ever-growing happiness in serving God as a Faithful Companion of Jesus.

A somewhat similar deposition was made by another Sister to whom the Foundress, whilst still living, had also appeared. "I was quite a child, and I did not know that the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus existed. One evening I was sent early to bed for some childish fault, for I was a giddy, thoughtless little girl and constantly in penance. I thought I saw an elderly lady approaching my bed. She was dressed in black, and wore a cloak like these worn by the nuns in England when they go out of doors. She stood for some moments close to me and looked at me. I shall never forget that severe and reproachful look. I do not remember what she said, but I felt terrified, and for years afterwards I often begged of God never to let me see that lady again. The impression that her look of rebuke made upon me is as vivid to-day as it was then. After I entered Religion I often heard Notre Mère spoken of. I was rather proud of this little episode of my childhood, and sometimes related it to those who had known our Foudress. I described her dress, her figure, her countenance, and the rest. They told me that this description corresponded exactly to her appearance. This incident happened in the year 1850 or perhaps in

1851, and I had then no knowledge whatever of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Later, I went to their school. In the end I joined the Society and have obtained many graces through the intercession of our holy Foundress" ("Preliminary Inquiry," pp. 212-13).

We take from the text of the "Preliminary Inquiry" an instance of bilocation.

"At a short distance from Birkenhead is Tranmere, at that time a village. An Irish girl who had left her native land for several years had completely given up the practice of her religion, and did not so much as go to Mass on Sundays. One Sunday morning towards eleven o'clock she fell asleep on a sofa in her room. Suddenly she saw before her the form of an aged nun, very bent, wearing a black habit and cap. Her eyes had a penetrating grave expression, and she spoke to the young girl in severe terms about hell, warning her that unless she changed her life she would certainly end there. The impression made on her by this apparition and discourse was such that the young girl rose at once and rushed from the house, intending to take immediate steps to change her life. As she drew near the church she saw the same aged nun on the church door-step who again spoke to her, bidding her go to the parish schools of Birkenhead and ask the Sister in charge to instruct her in her duties and to prepare her for the Sacraments. She further told her that she would find one of the Sisters who would have just dismissed the children standing at the school door preparing to lock it. She hurried to the spot and found the Sister in the act of closing the door. The girl called out breathlessly: 'Stop, Sister, stop,' at the same time running up the steps that led to the school. The nun whom she met was Mother Scholastica Connolly, then a novice, and

charged with the instruction of the women of the parish. Startled for a moment by the unexpected arrival of this girl, who was totally unknown to her, the Sister asked her what she wanted: 'I am an unfortunate girl who has gone wrong,' was her reply; 'I make day of night and night of day'. She then related the two apparitions with which she had been favoured, and the emotion she had felt under that penetrating gaze, and on hearing those threatening words. She described the person she had seen most accurately—a venerable woman, much bent and dressed like Sister Scholastica, with the exception of the cap, which, in her case, was black, while hers was white, for she was a novice. Sister Scholastica asked if she had ever seen nuns dressed in this manner going to Mass on Sunday in Birkenhead. The young girl had to confess that she had never been to Mass since she had left Ireland. The Sister went on to question her very closely, as to whether she had ever seen any one dressed in the same habit, but her answer was always in the negative. She then sent her to one of the priests of the parish for advice, while promising to remain in the schools until her return. The girl returned shortly after with a message from the priest, asking the nuns to instruct her and prepare her for the Sacraments. She often came to them afterwards and became a member of the Association of Christian Women who held their meetings in the parish schools. Mother Elizabeth Jones was then Superior of the Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Birkenhead and Mother Clotilde Dupont of that at Lingdale House, near the same town. Both these nuns were at once made acquainted with the details of this twofold apparition of the Foundress. Mother Marie de Bussy, who became Superior-General in 1888, arrived at Lingdale

House on the 3rd of June of the same year, 1854, and passed a few days there; she remembered Mother Clotilde Dupont's acquainting her with this extraordinary event and telling her that she informed Madame d'Houet of it only in a vague way for fear of alarming her humility. That same year Madame d'Houet, while visiting England in August and September, went to Birkenhead Convent. The Association of Christian Women assembled in the Elementary Schools to receive her, and the young girl who had been converted by the apparition was among the number. Mother Scholastica watched her closely, so that she might notice the impression produced by the sight of her benefactress. The moment Madame d'Houet entered the room the young girl became beside herself with emotion. Mother Scholastica, as if unintentionally, went towards her, when she at once said: 'Sister, that is the lady whom I saw, that is she herself'. The young girl persevered in her new course of life. Amidst manifold incentives to sin and great temptations she remained faithful, and was often seen praying before a statue of Our Lady much honoured in the schools. She used frequently to visit the Birkenhead Convent during the two or three years that she remained in the town, and three years later, on returning there, assured the nuns that she had persevered in the practice of her religious duties" ("Prelim. Inq.," pp. 225-32).

It is important to remark that the Foundress was never once absent from Paris during the months of April and May, 1854, and that this apparition took place somewhere between the first week of April and the last week of May in that year. She was therefore at the same time among her religious at Paris, and seen at Birkenhead. Madame d'Houet was conscious of the

incident, though through modesty and humility, whenever it was referred to either by word of mouth or in writing, she took no notice of it nor ever betrayed the part she had played in this conversion.

It is known for certain that our Lord and His Holy Mother appeared at times to the venerated Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Father Georgelin, S.C., who, before be became a religious, was chaplain to the convent at Paris, has disclosed something which she told him during her last illness.

"I reproduce," wrote Father Georgelin, "as exactly as I can, the account she gave to me on the Monday in Holy Week (March 29), 1858, a week before she died. I was left a widow, she said, at an early age, and was then far from thinking of entering the religious state. I wished to contract a second alliance, not from any positive attraction to the married state, but because in my father's home I did not find the happiness I longed for, though my family were good Christians. A very suitable person presented himself, and I was about to accept his offer, when one day, after Holy Communion, our Lord made me feel that He did not wish me to enter into this engagement. I replied: 'But I wish it; it is the only means I have of escaping from family responsibility and worries'. Then with ineffable sweetness, He made me understand that His love for me far outpassed all earthly affection. He seemed to turn towards me, and, making, as it were, an appeal to my very heart, to say to me: 'Will you not trust yourself entirely to me?' 'I only wish,' I replied, 'to do the will of God, and the will of God is, I believe, that I should marry again.' 'Trust yourself to me,' He insisted; 'if it be the will of God that you marry, I charge myself to find the spouse that He destines for you, and to unite you to

him. Grant Me what I ask.' After a long resistance, I consented."

In 1842, at Gumley House, Isleworth, London, W., a procession was moving through the grounds. Madame d'Houet walked immediately behind the stand on which was borne the statue of Our Lady. All at once, without, it would seem, any reason, the whole procession halted, and only after a pause all began to move on. A short time after this incident, Madame d'Houet and Mother Julia Guillemet were walking together in the Gumley grounds, and, pointing to the spot where she had been when the procession had so mysteriously stood still, she said: "It was there that the Blessed Virgin spoke to me".

One day Madame d'Houet interrupted her meditation in chapel in order to bless a postulant and admit her to the Society. "Our Lord," she said, "commanded me to do this. I resisted several times, for I wanted to receive you after my meditation, but He told me He wished me to leave Him and go to speak to you."

To our regret space does not permit us even to allude to the many other interesting facts of the same nature which Holy Church is examining into. "Several times," say those who had to appear before the ecclesiastical tribunals, "the countenance of the holy woman was seen to have become illumined with heavenly light." The orphans of Gentilly used to remark that there exhaled from her person a sweet fragrance, a wonder we often read of in the lives of chosen servants of God.

It remains to speak in another chapter of wonderful occurrences that, since her death, have seemed to witness to the high sanctity of God's servant.

St. Mary's Schools, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Taught by the Faithful Companions of Jesus

[See p. 360]

One of the Schools Taught by the Faithful Companions of Jesus at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

[See p. 360]

CHAPTER XXII.

WONDERFUL EVENTS FOLLOWING MADAME D'HOUET'S DEATH.

HARDLY had the holy Foundress left this world, when those who had known her felt impelled to pray *to* her rather than *for* her. Many at once began to have recourse to her intercession both in their spiritual necessities and in their times of physical suffering. Nor were their supplications put up in vain. So great a measure of supernatural strength and peace of soul was granted to those whom her death had plunged in grief that they themselves were astonished to find their mother had such power with God. Most remarkable of all was the merciful and loving Providence of God watching visibly over the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus at this sad and critical time. The special Providence extended to them, the nuns, no doubt rightly, and with one voice, attributed to the prayers and merits of God's humble and faithful servant. Of this matter we shall speak more fully in the next chapter. But before doing so, we have to chronicle certain remarkable events which immediately followed, or which have taken place since, the death of the venerable Foundress.

On April 5, 1858, a little before noon, Mother Anna Guéno, who was pruning the plants in a conservatory at Lingdale House Convent, Birkenhead, ran into an adjoining room, where Mother Gertrude Morran was sitting

writing, and asked her, in a tone of alarm, if she had called her. "No," was the reply, "I did not speak." There was not a sound in the house at the time, for all the pupils, who were spending the Easter holidays at the convent, had gone out for a walk. Then Mother Anna Guéno, bursting into tears, cried out: "I am sure that Reverend Mother General is dead. I have seen her and I heard her voice saying to me quite distinctly: 'Mother Anna, I am no longer of this world. Tell our Sisters that I am well.'" A few moments later Mother Joseph Bougue came by and entered the room, and Mother Anna, turning to her, said: "Notre Mère is dead. She said to me: 'Mother Anna, tell our Sisters that I am well'. I saw her and she was smiling. I saw her there." And Mother Anna pointed up in the direction where she had seen the apparition. They tried to console her and persuade her that it was only her imagination, but she persisted that she had really seen Madame d'Houet. Three days later a letter announced that on April 5, almost at the very moment Mother Anna had seen her, the beloved Foundress had passed away.

In the month of July, 1858, the year of Madame d'Houet's death, a little girl from Africa, between six and seven years old, a pupil at Laurel Hill Convent, Limerick, rose one morning in a great state of joy and excitement. She declared that she had seen the Foundress during the night, and she had told her she herself was soon to quit this earth and to go to Heaven. The child related this to her little companions both in the dormitory and on her way to chapel, and during the day the children talked about nothing else. When the child was questioned by the Sisters she related that during the night she had seen a beautiful place, where she beheld, surrounded by many other

religious, the good Mother, who called her with a smile and said: "Come to me, Mary Ellen; you are soon to die, and then you too will come to Heaven". Some one remarked: "How do you know that it was our good Mother, since you never saw her?" "I do know her well," was the child's reply. Then she went on: "She wore the habit of the Faithful Companions, and she looked very small (Madame d'Houet was short in stature)". She described her appearance accurately, and dwelt especially on her look, which was very penetrating, but yet so kind as to fill the child's heart with joy. A few days afterwards the little thing sickened and died. As a special privilege her body was buried in the cemetery attached to Laurel Hill Convent.

What follows is from the evidence given by one of Madame d'Houet's daughters, a nun who had charge of the postulants at Nice in 1862-3.

"While I had charge of the postulants at Nice, a young girl presented herself, bringing letters of reference from Monseigneur Vintimiglia. We welcomed her with pleasure and saw in her all the marks of a religious vocation. Her modest demeanour, good sense and general conduct made us hope she would turn out a good and useful subject, but after some months the enemy of souls began to torment her with all kinds of temptations. It was useless trying to convince her that the devil was endeavouring to deceive her and force her to return into the world. Sometimes to calm her, hours were needed. Alas! all was to no purpose. One day she declared that she had made up her mind to return to her family and would write at once to ask them to come for her on the following day. That night, in a dream, our venerated Mother Foundress appeared to her. She described her accurately, although she

had never seen her, as short in stature and much bent. Our venerated Mother said to her in a serious and almost severe tone: 'What! You wish to leave religion, for the sake of returning to the world! Very well, I promise you that if you do give up your vocation, you will lose your soul.' The poor girl was so terrified that she awoke and could not close her eyes for the rest of the night. She longed for daylight so that she might go to her novice-mistress, tell her what had happened, and assure her that she would never leave her convent. Before the end of the first meditation I went to the Superior to say that Louise no longer wished to return home. The Superior had not much confidence in her resolve, and expected that, in a few days' time, she would again request us to leave. She therefore bade me simply tell her that she was at full liberty to act as she pleased. When her brother-in-law came to take her home that morning, her first words on meeting him were: "I am not going to leave the convent". All he could do to persuade her to change her mind was useless. She was steadfast in her resolution, and from that day grew more and more attached to her holy vocation. She was sent to Paris, where she was clothed with the religious habit and made her vows. Later on, at Gentilly, she fell into consumption, and died a most holy and edifying death ("Preliminary Inquiry," pp. 323-5).

The "Preliminary Inquiry" recounts another apparition. The holy Foundress who, during her lifetime, had predicted the religious vocation of a young girl, and had later on appeared to her while she was at a ball, visibly assisted her during her last illness ("Preliminary Enquiry," pp. 319-22). At Gentilly, too, in 1888, the holy Foundress is believed to have appeared to a Sister who

was lying dangerously ill. The author of this work knew very well the Sister in question, but he learned the details of the apparition from the lips of Mother Stanislaus Lawless to whom she had confided them.

The miraculous cures believed to have been worked by Madame d'Houet after her death, and even those among them of which a record has been kept, are still more numerous than those which were attributed to her prayers during her lifetime.

The following cures are set down in the "Preliminary Inquiry":—

Sister Susanne Gaillard of the convent at Carouge was suffering from an attack of rheumatic gout. Her condition was such as to make the doctors declare that it baffled all medical skill. She could not so much as raise her food to her mouth on account of the acute pain in her fingers and of their swollen state, and she suffered continuous and intolerable agony in all parts of her body. One day, when suffering more than usual, she felt impelled to seek the intercession of the holy Foundress. She placed a strip of flannel which had belonged to her on her right shoulder where the pain was most acute. That very instant all pain ceased, her fingers became flexible, and the swelling disappeared. She, who for days past had been unable to raise her hands to her mouth, could move them freely, and ate with a good appetite. Her cure was perfect and permanent.

In the spring of 1865 the mind of Sister Passeren gave way. The malady resisted all treatment, and she became so violent that arrangements were made to place her in an asylum. One night, when she was getting beyond all control, one of the Sisters taking care of her bethought herself of placing on her head a piece of linen which had been used by Madame d'Houet. The

poor sufferer at once fell asleep, and after some hours of rest rose up perfectly calm and with her senses restored to her. Feeling that she was cured, she forthwith went to the chapel to thank God for his goodness to her. From that day forward she performed her appointed work quietly and devotedly, nor ever again showed any symptom of mental derangement.

In 1872, at the convent, Dee House, Chester, Mother Mary Magdalen Montrose was attacked by muscular rheumatism. Four months later dropsy and paralysis of the right side set in. The doctor having pronounced her case hopeless, she was being prepared to receive the last Sacraments, when the infirmarian bethought herself of applying a piece of flannel, which had been used by Madame d'Houet, to the patient's side. The latter immediately fell asleep to wake up perfectly cured.

In September, 1873, Sister Mary Ronske of the convent, Adelphi House, Salford, dislocated her jaw-bone. The doctors said it needed a miracle to set her right again. The Sister made a novena to the Holy Foundress, at the end of which she found herself perfectly cured, to the great astonishment of the doctors, who could only attribute it to her great faith.

From many other cures given in the "Preliminary Inquiry," we select the following :—

A child of twelve, a pupil at Laurel Hill, Limerick, who appeared to be dying, recovered instantaneously on a piece of flannel, which had belonged to Madame d'Houet, being applied to her body.

Another child was miraculously cured at the convent, Veyrier-sous-Salève (Savoy). Her father, a doctor, gave a certificate which we insert verbatim :—

"I, the undersigned, certify that from the first days of December, 1890, until the 7th of the same month inclusively, my daughter,

Julia Xavier, aged seven years, was in a critical condition, resulting from a painful growth in the neck. I feared that an incision with the surgical instrument known as the bistoury would be necessary. I visited her on December 8, in company with the doctor of the convent, and saw that the feverish condition and the growth in the neck had both disappeared. The cure was due to the application of a piece of linen which had belonged to the venerable Madame d'Houet, Foundress of the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

(Signed). EDMUND XAVIER,
Veyrier-sous-Salève, Savoy,
April 6, 1894.

We pass now to the spiritual favours attributed to the intercession of Madame d'Houet. Although such graces are more difficult to put in evidence than those of the physical order, it is a matter of common knowledge, in the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and among their pupils, that many and many a supernatural grace has been obtained by invoking the succour of the holy Foundress.

One of the witnesses cited by the ecclesiastical tribunals, deposed that, on hearing of Madame d'Houet's death in April, 1858, she forthwith betook herself to prayer, and asked the holy woman to give her a proof of the glory she enjoyed in Heaven by obtaining the conversion of her mother who for a long time had given up practising her religion. She was promptly and fully heard. Easter was all but over but the sinner's heart was suddenly touched and without being urged thereto by anyone, she went to Confession and Communion before Low Sunday.

The following paragraph is supplied by one of Madame d'Houet's spiritual daughters.

A few years after the death of our venerated Foundress, I was a prey to great interior sufferings, the result, probably, of a lack of the true religious spirit. One day,

when more than usually disturbed, I took up a piece of muslin, belonging to a cap which our Foundress had worn, and which I had had by me since her death. Then, just as if I were addressing her personally, and as if she could hear me, I said in an agony of mind: "O Reverend Mother, what am I to do?" I thought I heard a voice in tone and accent exactly like that of Notre Mère. It seemed to say: "Pray for the spirit of the Society". I did not hear this voice with the ears of the body; nevertheless it gave me courage and strength. From that moment God in his goodness gradually delivered me from the interior troubles which had so tortured me. This account was written in English, except the words attributed to the Foundress. These were in French, the only language which Madame d'Houet knew and spoke. We lay stress on this circumstance, not because it adds to the wonder of the fact, but because it seems significant.

The extraordinary events which we have recounted in the foregoing pages are, it must be well understood, couched in very guarded language. We also feel bound to say that many incidents have been purposely omitted, for fear of seeming to anticipate the favourable decision of Holy Church, and of infringing her regulations concerning the "Non cultus" of the Servants of God. The Faithful Companions of Jesus have been most circumspect in regard to this, perhaps overmuch so. They have not only avoided noising abroad the wonders worked among them, but they have refrained even in their own communities from any notable display of devotion to their venerable Foundress. Their discreet reticence has deprived us of the knowledge of much that otherwise might well have found a place in this volume.

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Fitchburgh, Mass., U.S.A.

Founded 1896

[*See p.* 360]

Church, School, and Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Gilbertville, Mass., U.S.A.

Founded 1906

[*See p.* 361]

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEVELOPMENT AND WORKS OF THE FAITHFUL COMPANIONS OF JESUS.

In 1856, Madame d'Houet had made provision for the government of her Society on her demise, by appointing Julia Guillemet, Mother-Vicar, until the election of her successor. She made no alteration in this arrangement during her last illness, though more than once it became clear from her own words that she had a presentiment, or even, let us say, a certainty, that Mother Julia was not destined by God to govern the Society as its second Superior-General.[1]

As a matter of fact Mother Julia did not outlive Madame d'Houet more than three weeks. On April 30 the heart-failure, from which she suffered, suddenly carried her off. This unexpected loss made the situation of the Society all the more critical, complicated as it was from many outside difficulties having arisen, consequent on the death of the Foundress. Notwithstanding these, a provisional government was speedily organized, and a second Mother-Vicar canonically placed at its head, under the benevolent protection of His Eminence

[1] It was remarked, after the death of Mother Julia Guillemet, that during the last weeks of the Foundress's life, when discoursing with Mother Julia about the Society, she invariably, contrary to her usual practice, had another of her daughters, Mother Stanislaus Lawless, present. Besides, as the reader knows, she had long before very emphatically announced Mother Julia's speedy death.

Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris. Thanks to the same protection, and to that of Monseigneur Marilley, Bishop of Lausanne and Geneva, Mother Josephine Petit, who had been chosen Mother-Vicar in succession to Mother Julia was, in due course, unanimously elected Superior-General of the Society, at Carouge, on September 14, 1858, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

In the Annals of the Institute we read that during the six months that elapsed between the Foundress's death and the election of the new Superior-General, the houses of the Society carried on their work as usual without the least shadow of unrest or of anxiety about the future. Surely this event, taken alone, is a convincing proof of the excellence of the spirit which the Foundress had, with the help of God, established in her communities. Order and observance of rule were maintained unimpaired. Everywhere the subjects cheerfully obeyed their local superiors, seeing in them God's representatives, just as the rule prescribes. The local superiors, in their turn, were peacefully awaiting, from the hand of God, the appointment of her who was to be their future guide and mother. In this time of uncertainty, some words uttered by the Foundress on her death-bed were verified. At certain moments, when wrapt in God, she seemed to give expression to an interior utterance which was making itself heard in her soul, and said gently: "Tell her who is to succeed me as Superior-General, that this Society is very easy to govern. As a mother leads a little child by the hand, thus is the Society led by its Superior."

Madame d'Houet left her business affairs in perfect order. We have this on the testimony of her lawyers. Certain legal complications which arose at

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Château de Graty, Hainault, Belgium

Founded 1903

[*See p.* 360]

Couvent du St. Rosaire, Avenue Montjoie, Uccle, Brussels

Founded 1903

[*See p.* 360]

her death convinced even her enemies that besides being a saint the Foundress was a capable woman of business.

Before concluding this biography let us recall to the minds of our readers a conversation already referred to, which took place between Madame d'Houet and Mlle. Adèle Bougue. "In less than two years after my death," the holy woman had predicted, "the house at Bourges will be re-established." M. Philippe de Bengy, the Foundress's brother, who proved a true friend to the Society in difficulties which arose after her death, advised the new Superior-General to apply to the Archbishop of Bourges, Cardinal du Pont, for permission to re-establish her community in his archiepiscopal city. Reverend Mother Josephine Petit, unable at the time to go to Bourges, deputed two of her religious to visit his Eminence in her name. The Cardinal received them benevolently and courteously, it is true, but declined to revoke the measures taken by his predecessor. He remarked, however, as if to console the Sisters, that perhaps his own successor would see his way to grant what he refused. On leaving the palace the two unsuccessful applicants found Mlle. Adèle Bougue waiting for them. Directly she heard of the Cardinal's veto she exclaimed with characteristic vivacity: "So much the worse for the Cardinal; he has not long to live". The two Mothers were astonished and horrified. She went on: "You know what Notre Mère told me. You will see the fulfilment of what she said will occur." A few months later Cardinal du Pont died. His successor, Monseigneur Mengaud, almost immediately after his nomination to the see of Bourges, permitted the Faithful Companions of Jesus to return there, and on December 2, 1859, scarcely eighteen months after

Madame d'Houet's death, Mass was offered up for the first time since 1837 in the chapel, empty and deserted for over twenty years, and on the very altar for the purchase of which, as before related, she had given her permission on her bed of death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LIST OF CONVENTS.

We append a list of the convents of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Convents founded during the lifetime of the Foundress :—

Amiens, France	1820
Nantes, France	1825
Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, Morbihan, France	1826
London	1830
Carouge, Geneva, Switzerland	1832
Bourges, France	1835
Turin, Italy	1836
Nice, France	1839
Gumley House, Isleworth, London, W.	1841
Laurel Hill, Limerick, Ireland	1844
Liverpool	1844
Camon, Amiens (Orphanage)	1845
Paris	1847
Gentilly, Paris (Orphanage and School)	1849
Lingdale House (transferred to Upton Hall, Cheshire, in 1863)	1849
Holt Hill, Tranmere, Birkenhead, Cheshire	1851
Adelphi House, Salford, Manchester	1852
Brook Street, Manchester (transferred to Fallowfield)	1853
Dee House, Chester	1853
Bruff, Co. Limerick, Ireland	1856

The Foundress also opened the following convents which, for one reason or other, she later found it necessary to close :—

Châteauroux, Indre, France	1823
Langres, France	1829
Annecy, Savoy (Sardinian States)	1831
Estavayer, Canton of Fribourg, Switzerland	1832
Tottenham, London	1835
Asti, Alessandria, North Italy	1838
Menotey, Sainte-Claude, France	1838
Hampstead, London, N.W.	1839
Oughterarde, Galway, Ireland.	1843

Convents founded since the Foundress's death.

Lark Hill House, Preston, Lancs.	1861
Newtownbarry, Co. Wexford, Ireland	1862
Skipton-in-Craven, Yorks	1865
Exeter, Devonshire	1867
Rueil, Paris	1868
Middlesborough, Yorks	1872
Guérande, Loire Inferièure, France	1875
Veyrier-sous-Salève, Haute Savoie, France	1877
Poplar, London, E.	1881
Richmond, Melbourne, Australia	1882
Prince Albert, Canada	1883
Brandon, Manitoba, Canada	1883
West Hartlepool, Durham	1885
Henriville, Amiens	1885
Calgary, Alberta, Canada	1885
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada	1888
Paisley, Scotland	1889
Kew, Melbourne, Australia	1889
Benalla, Melbourne, Australia	1890
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada	1891
Rat-Portage, Ontario, Canada	1892
Fitchburg, Massachusetts, U.S.A.	1896
Château de Graty, Hainault, Belgium	1903
Uccle, Brussels	1903
Fribourg, Switzerland	1903

Salford Training College, Sedgley Park, Manchester	1904
Namur, Belgium	1904
Gilbertville, Massachusetts, U.S.A.	1906
Edmonton (St. Anne's), Alberta, Canada	1910
Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia	1911
Val Plaisant, St. Heliers, Jersey	1911
St. Matthews, Jersey	1911
Bagatelle, St. Saviour's, Jersey	1912
Cliftonville, Kent	1912

The details of the foundations made since the death of the Foundress belong to a future historian of her life and work.

To try to reckon up all the souls to whom she and her daughters have been instrumental in doing good would be to attempt the impossible. There comes to the mind a glorious group like unto that multitude which no man can number, seen in vision by St. John. "Vidi turbam magnam quam dinumerare nemo poterat ex omnibus gentibus stantes ante thronam" (Apoc. VII. 9).

CHAPTER XXV.

CAUSE OF THE SERVANT OF GOD.

The Cause of the Beatification and Canonization of Madame de Bonnault d'Houet has for many years been going through the ordinary canonical course in Rome. The matter was first taken up by his Eminence Cardinal Chigi, Papal Nuncio in Paris, seconded by Cardinal Mermillod and other distinguished prelates.

In 1874 the Superior-General of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Reverend Mother Josephine Petit, who succeeded the Foundress in the government of the Society, approached his Eminence, Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, on the subject of the Introduction of Madame d'Houet's Cause. He gave his cordial "proficiat" to the undertaking and delegated to the very Reverend Father Apollinaire, F.M.C., the task of gathering preliminary information. Between the years 1875 and 1878, copious documents were brought together, and a Postulator, the Right Reverend Father Amadeus, F.M.C., named Postulator of the cause in Rome, and the very Reverend Father Apollinaire, Vice-Postulator in France.

The French religious troubles of 1880 stopped further steps for the time being. It was not until 1886 that Cardinal Richard, who had succeeded Cardinal Guibert in the Archiepiscopal See of Paris, sanctioned the erection of an ecclesiastical tribunal in Paris for the examination of witnesses bearing testimony to the heroic sanctity

The Chapel, Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Val Plaisant, Jersey, C.I.

Founded 1911 [*See p.* 361]

Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Bagatelle, Jersey, C.I.

Founded 1912 [*See p.* 361]

of the Servant of God, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet, Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

His Eminence, Cardinal Richard, himself presided at the inaugural session held in Paris, on December 20, 1888, when the ecclesiastical functionaries of the tribunal were appointed and sworn in. The succeeding sessions, and there were many, were held in one of the oratories in the Paris Convent in Rue de la Santé.

In order to facilitate the examination of witnesses who, for one reason or another, could not conveniently go to Paris, subsidiary tribunals were erected in France and elsewhere under the beneficent patronage and with the cordial permission of the Ordinaries. Such tribunals were held in France, at Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, St. Claude, Veyrier-sous-Salève, and in England at Birkenhead. In this last place, His Lordship, Bishop Knight (R.I.P.) was the "Judge," and gave a very considerable portion of his valuable time to the lengthy process of examining witnesses. This was done in the most disinterested and generous spirit, with a view, as he used to say: "That the holy Foundress might bless his Diocese of Shrewsbury".

On January 14, 1894, the very Reverend Father Stanislaus, F.M.C., who had become the Vice-Postulator of the Cause in 1884, took to Rome a sealed casket containing the documentary evidence of the many witnesses who had been examined and had borne testimony to the heroic sanctity of the Servant of God. This he placed in the hands of the Cardinal Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. He also presented to the Postulator in Rome, the Right Reverend Father Maurus of Leonissa, who had succeeded the Right Reverend Father Amadeus, on his death in 1886, a

second deposit—a casket containing over four hundred "Petitions" bearing more than twelve hundred signatures. These "Petitions" were signed by twelve Cardinals, by more than two hundred Archbishops and Bishops of France, England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, Australia, and the United States; by 450 Superiors of Religious Orders, canons, and church dignitaries, and by 650 secular persons.

We hope the day is fast approaching when the Faithful Companions of Jesus will have the happiness of honouring their Foundress as "Venerable" in the technical sense of the word.

INDEX.

Acheul's, St., College, 25, 26, 33, 34, 38, 42, 98.
Adelphi House, Salford, Foundation of, 228, 249, 250.
Affre, Mgr., Archbishop of Paris, 238, 239, 240.
Amadeus, Father, 362.
Amiens, 26, 33, 37, 59, 73, 74, 75, 82, 85, 100, 103, 111, 125, 146, 147.
Anne-d'Auray, Sainte-, Foundation of, 121, 125, 363.
Annecy, Savoy, Foundation of, 175.
— — Suppression of, 175, 183.
Apollinaire, Father, F.M.C., 362.
Arms, De Bengy, Cover, 1, 7.
— De Bonnault, Cover and 7.
Army of Loire, 28.
Asti, 191, 208, 253.
Aubercourt, Louise Bosquillon de, 9.
Azeglio, Marquis of, 184.

Bécel, Mgr., Bishop of Vannes, Preface.
Belgium, 161.
Bengy, Angèle de, 10, 12, 14, 152.
— Anatole de, 9.
— Philippe de, 12, 13, 357.
— Sylvain, Charles Pierre de, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 28, 29, 83, 152, 156.
Berbières, 37.
Bertazzoli, Cardinal, 135.
Besançon, 64.
Bicheron, Curé de, 76.
Birkenhead, Holt Hill, Foundation of, 249, 363.
Boissard, S.J., Father, 66.
Bomballes, Mgr., Bishop of Amiens, 92.
Bonnault d'Houet, Viscountess de—
Birth, 2.
Baptism, 2.
Childhood, 2.
Marriage, 7.
Death of husband, 8.
Birth of son, 9.
Death, 284.
Advice to re-marry given and contradicted, 21.
Affection for her father, 4, 83.
— — — spiritual daughters, 110, 211, 256, 304, 314.
Bonnault d'Houet, Viscountess de—
Almsgiving, 8.
Alms, wishes to live on, 78, 80, 81.
Business capacity, 113, 328, 356.
Charity to exiled Italian priests, 14.
— — Spanish prisoners of war, 11.
— spirit of, 292, 311, 312, 314.
Christian life in world (chapter I.).
Communion, first, 4.
Confession, first, 3.
Confidence in God, 206, 208, 212, 240-2, 254.
Conscience, delicacy of, 3.
Consecration to B.V.M. in infancy, 2.
— — — formula of, 75.
Consideration for faults of others, 311, 312, 313, 328.
Contracts pestilence, 11.
Dealings with servants in the world, 21, 22, 23.
Descendants, 9.
Determination of will in childhood and youth, 3, 5.
Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, 77, 90, 98, 99, 226, 257, 292, 318.
— — Our Lady, 75, 81, 87, 89, 216, 226, 246, 253, 257, 275, 292, 294, 295, 299.
Early training by her mother, 4, 5.
Election as Superior-General, 148.
Faith-virtue of, 290.
Fervour in presence of B. Sacrament, 34, 300.
Formation of Society-Interior, 73, 74.
Four things asked by God for others, 40.
— — — — — for herself, 41.
Hope, virtue of, 240, 291.
Houet, Madame d', name of, 18, 33.
Humility, virtue of, 17, 19, 89, 94, 107, 118, 150, 154, 155, 275, 277, 278, 304, 305, 308.
Ideal family household, 22, 49.
Illnesses, 6, 60, 103, 125, 143, 152, 269.
"La Bonne Dame," 22, 23.
Love of Pleasure in early life, 9, 33.
Love of Suffering, 302.
Meditation, 301.
Miracles, 330-54.

Bonnault d'Houet, Viscountess de—
Moral Courage, 259, 328.
Mortification, spirit of, 223, 309, 318, 319, 320.
Motto of Foundress, 291.
Musical Talent, 6.
Obedience, Practice of, 56, 71, 322, 324.
— Teaching on, 211, 221, 319, 324.
Patience, 308, 310.
Permission to begin her work, 59.
Petition to Pope, 196.
Poverty, spirit of, 78, 79, 88, 113, 120, 150, 151, 226, 317.
Prayer, spirit of, 100, 218, 246, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302.
Propagation of Devotion to Immaculate Conception, B.V.M., 296.
Prophetic Statements, 153, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335.
Prudence, 326.
Relations with the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, 24, 25, 84, 85, 102, 107.
Resolutions, 70.
Retreats, 57, 69, 72, 154.
Rome, 1st visit, 124.
— 2nd visit, 188.
Rosary, devotion to, 77, 127, 239, 241, 296.
Rule of life and thoughts respecting Institute at beginning, 74, 76, 77, 78.
Sacred Heart, Devotion to, 81, 292.
Self-control, 309.
Silence, practice of, 217, 279, 280, 309, 317, 318.
Superior-General, election of, 148.
Supernatural voices and communications, 20, 21, 31, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 47, 51, 53, 58, 88, 126, 195, 301.
Vow of chastity advised, 35.
— — — made conditionally, 38.
— — — — formally, 57.
Zeal, 6, 12, 14, 43, 108, 117, 303, 304.
— Antoine Joseph De Bonnault, 7, 8.
— Jehan De Bonnault (ancestor), 7.
— Joseph Marie De Bonnault (grandson), 9, 258.
— Leon Marie Antoine Joseph De Bonnault (grandson), 9, 282.
— Marie Louis Xavier De Bonnault (grandson), 9.
— Marie Sylvain Antoine Eugene De Bonnault (son), 9, 24, 33, 34, 37, 48, 51, 84, 151.
Bouillerie, M. de la, 255.
Bouillon, Madame du, 66.
Bouque, Adèle, 204, 273, 358.
Bourges, 3, 7, 14, 17, 20, 21, 23, 29, 31-4, 49, 63, 64, 81, 85, 112, 152.
Bourges, Foundation of convent at, 183.
— Suppression, 204.
— Re-opening, 273, 274, 357.
Bournonville, Henriette, Esmangard de, 9.
Broglie, Charles de, 25.
Bruff, Limerick, Foundation at, 264.
Brusson, M., 162, 163.
Burdalot, M., 176.
Bussières-le-Belmont, 156, 158.

Camon, Amiens, Foundation of orphanage at, 111.
Carmelites, 36, 39.
Carouge, Geneva, Foundation at, 176-84, 206, 207, 225, 244.
Carron, Abbé, 166, 169, 170.
Castracane, Cardinal, 192, 195, 208, 249.
Châbons, Mgr. de, Bishop of Amiens, 19, 104, 117, 124, 146, 161, 188, 209.
Châlons, 126.
Champigny, Madame de (see de Bengy, Angèle).
Chantal, Jane Frances de, 8.
Charles Albert, King of Sardinia, 175, 184, 241.
Charity, Association of, 251.
Châteauroux (Indre), 2, 104, 112, 114, 125, 152, 204, 208.
Chester, Dee House, Foundation at, 257.
Chevroz, 65.
Chigi, Cardinal, 362.
Claveau, M., 113.
— Abbé, 3, 4.
Clement XIV., Pope, 24.
Clorivières, S.J., Father, 25, 26.
Colombières, Père, 13.
Congny de la Presle, Nicholas, 2.
— — Marie, 1.
Correur, Abbé, 92, 98.
Corsi, Mgr., 140, 142.
Cotta, Canon, 91, 92.
Courville, Madame de, 116.
Cussen, Rev. Dr., 264.

Dee House, Chester, Foundation of, 257.
Delaporte, Euphrasia, 109, 117.
— M., 117.
Deplace, S.J., Father, 102.
Desgenettes, Curé N. D. des Victoires, 286.
Dôle, 66.
Druilhet, S.J., Father, 71, 72, 76, 83, 84, 91.
Dubois, M., 96.
Dupont, Cardinal, Archbishop of Bourges, 274, 357.
Dupuy, M., 94, 95, 99.

Education, Scope of—
Boarding Schools, beginning of, 115.
Day Schools, beginning of, 219, 227.
Night Schools, beginning of, 229.
Poor Schools, 111, 114, 119, 123, 172, 182, 186, 219, 228, 230, 247.
Estavayer, Foundation of, 183.
Evian, 176, 180.

Faith, Fathers of the, 25, 35.
Fantini, Abbé, 185.
Faustina, St., 251.
Florence, Italy, 127.
Foloppe, S.J., Father, 52, 59, 60, 63, 68, 86, 90.
Fontana, M., 179.
Fouché, 25.
Fribourg, Switzerland, 179, 183.

Garnier, Mgr., Bishop of Vannes, 123.
Gasquet, Abbot, President of English Benedictines, Preface and 166.
Gaudin, M. l'Abbé, 20, 31, 63, 83.
Gaume, l'Abbé, 248.
Gendrin, Dr., 271.
Geneva, 177, 178, 180.
Geneviève, St., Church of, 57.
Gentil, S.J., Father, 102.
Gentilly, Foundation of, 247, 288.
Georglin, l'Abbé, 272, 273, 276, 283.
Gesù, Church of the, 131, 266.
Ghent, 162, 164.
Gregory XVI, 199.
Griffiths, Bishop, 172, 214.
Groberto, Abbé, 15, 127, 129.
Guérines, Mgr., Bishop of Nantes, 117, 119.
Guers, Emilie, 223, 281.
Guibert, Cardinal, Archbishop of Paris, 362.
Guillemet, Julia, 100, 103, 149, 161, 173, 211, 215, 219, 241, 254, 282, 285, 333, 355.
Gumley House, Isleworth, Foundation of, 213, 223, 224, 253.

Hailles, Château de, 9.
Hammon, M. (Lazarist), 92.
Hampstead, House of Ease at, 210, 255.
Houet, Madame d' (name), 18, 33.
Hutinet, Abbé, 156.

Introduction of the cause of the Servant of God, 362.
Issoudun, 6.

Jeantier, S.J., Father, 48, 49, 51, 64-7.
Jennesseaux, S.J., Father de, 26.
Jersey, 167, 168.
Jesuit Fathers, confidence of Foundress in, 43, 71, 83, 134.
Joan of Arc (Blessed), 7.
Joyeuse, Dukes de, 68.

Kirwin, Rev. Dr., 210.
Knight, Dr., Bishop of Shrewsbury, 363.

La Buona Madre di Montenero, 7.
Langres, Foundation at, 157, 159.
— Suppression of foundation at, 204.
Laurel Hill, Limerick, Foundation of, 218.
Lausanne, 176.
Lawless, Stanislaus M., 283, 355.
Leghorn, 127.
Legrand, Madame, 105, 112, 119, 125, 149, 156.
Leleu, S.J., Father, 67, 122.
Lenssens, Maria, 112, 150, 205, 239.
Lequex, Canon, 288.
Lescailles, M. de, 266.
Lesève, Mdlle., 6.
Les Oiseaux, Convent of, 45, 50, 51, 72.
Libermann, Father, 247.
Lingdale House, 262.
Liverpool, Foundation at, 219.
Locard, Baron, 114.
London, Foundation at, 160, 173, 210, 241, 256.
Loriquet, S.J., Father, 84.
Lyons, 126.

Mallet, S.J., Father, 64.
Mancini, Mgr., Archbishop of Siena, 14, 15, 127, 189.
Manchester, Brook Street, Foundation at, 251.
Mandolx, Mgr. de, Bishop of Amiens, 24.
Manning, Cardinal, 172.
Marche (de la), Bishop of St. Pol, 168.
Marchetti, 139, 140.
Marseilles, 126.
Martial, St., Church of, 2.
Martin, Abbé, 17.
Massiley, Mgr., Bishop of Lausanne and Geneva, 251.
Maurus, Father, F.M.C., 363.
Mengand, Mgr., 356.
Menotey, Foundation at, 209, 247.
Mermillod, Cardinal, 183, 362.
Montrouge, 68.
Moreau, Abbé, 287.
— Honorine, 112.
Morlot, Cardinal, Archbishop of Paris, 264, 286.
Morris, Bishop, 263.

Name, Holy, 87, 88.
— — Feast of, 88.
Nantes, Foundation at, 117-20, 125, 148, 216, 259.

Nérinckx, Father Jean, 164, 173, 210.
— Miss, 165, 174.
Nice, Foundation at, 208.
Nollet, Louise, 116.

Odescalchi, Cardinal, 197.
Offoy, Claudine d', 9.
Orcet, d'Aragones, Bishop of Langres, 157.
Orléans, Princesses of, 214.
Oughterarde, Galway, 215, 217.

Pacca, Cardinal, 140.
Paccanari, Father, 25.
Papin, Mdlle., 68.
Parassy, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 31, 49, 64.
Paris, 37, 45, 47, 61, 63, 73, 103, 112.
— Foundation at, 238, 240, 242, 248, 266, 270, 362.
Parisis, Mgr., Bishop of Langres, 204.
Parker, Father, 219.
Perugia, 201.
Petit, Josephine, Second Superior-General of the Society, I.C.J., 189, 193, 223, 356, 357, 362.
Picolet, M., 176.
Picpus, 68.
Pius VII, 24.
Preface to English volume, by Cardinal Bourne, v.
— — — — — Abbot Gasquet, ix.
— to French volume, xvii.
Prefatory Letter to French volume (Bishop of Vannes), xxi.

Raven, Anna, 112.
Recamier, Dr., 244, 245.
Retreats, 40, 80, 157, 205, 255.
Richard, Cardinal, Archbishop of Paris, 252, 262, 363.
Rochfort, Constance, 6.
Rome, 124, 188.
Ryan, Bishop of Limerick, 218.

Sacred Heart, Fathers of, 25.
— — Picture preserved from flames, 12.
Saint-Claude, Bishop of, 209.
Sala, Cardinal, 191, 195.
Salford, Foundation at, 249.
Scott, S.J., Father, 173.
Sellier, S.J., Father, 34, 35, 38-40, 44, 59-61, 69, 74, 76, 82-85, 254.
Sibour, Mgr., Archbishop of Paris, 251, 255, 264.
Siena, 127, 130, 142, 189.
Siena, Archbishop of (see Mancini).
Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus—
Almighty God its Founder, 17, 70, 87, 136, 155, 208, 222.
Approval by Holy See (Gregory XVI), 201.
Beginning of Society, 74, 75.
B.V.M. shown as Superior-General, 208, 211.
Brief of Praise (Leo XII), 140, 146.
Its development, 355-59.
Its first Convent, 61, 62, 90-96, 109.
Rules of St. Ignatius given, 52, 60.
Title, 87, 88, 136, 146, 199, 260, 302, 303.
Soglia, Mgr., 131, 132, 141, 189, 191, 192, 194.
Somaglia, Cardinal, 145.
Stanislaus, F.M.C., Father, Author, Preface, 363.

Thiollaz, M., Bishop of Annecy, 175.
Tissot, Abbé, 175, 180.
Tonerre-Clermont, Duke de, 111.
Tottenham, London, Burning of convent at, 254.
— — Foundation at, 212.
Toulon, 127.
Tournai, 161.
Tournely, Abbé de, 25.
Turin, Foundation at, 184, 241, 253.
Turner, Bishop of Salford, 234.

Upton Hall, near Birkenhead, Foundation at (see Lingdale House), 262, 289.

Varin, S.J., Father, 25-40, 45-77, 83, 84, 86, 90, 93, 94, 106.
Varlet, S.J., Father, 97, 102, 104.
Vaucombruge, M., 162.
Veyrier-sous-Salève, Convent of, 183, 363.
Victoires, Notre Dame des, 284, 296.
Villeneuve, Marie Madeleine Sonmard de, 2.
Villette, Mgr., Archbishop of Bourges, 174, 204.
Viterbo, St. Rose of, 130.

Wiseman, Cardinal, 172.
Women, holy, 66, 87, 279, 293.

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